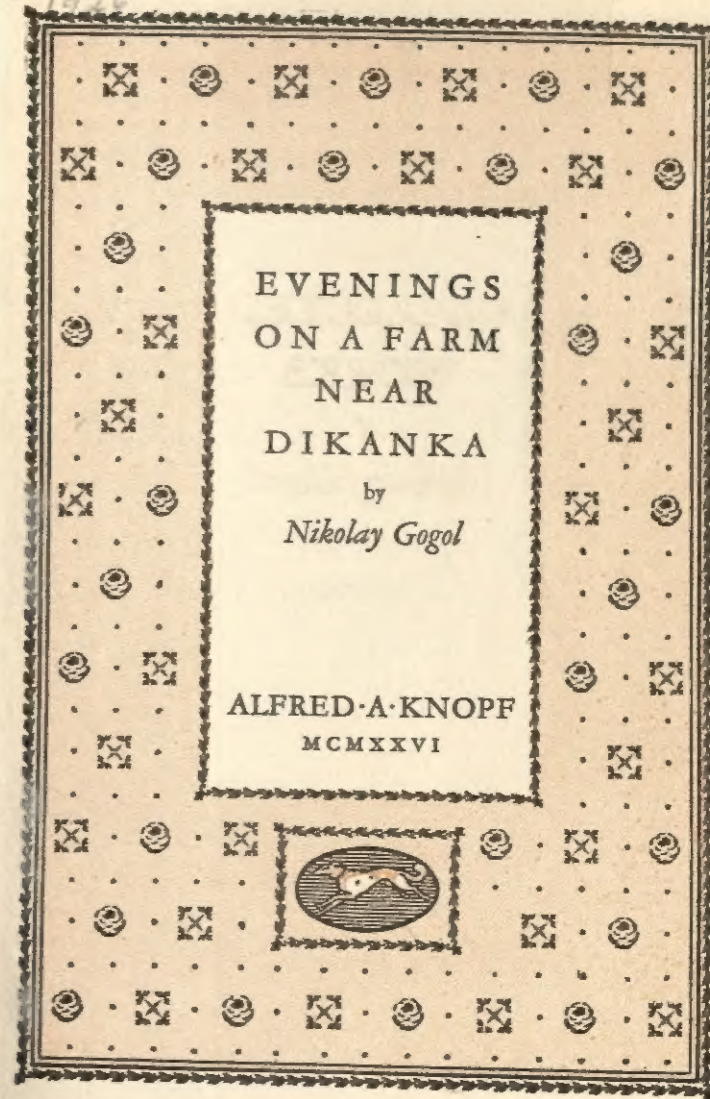


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TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

THE following tales are the earliest of Gogol's writings that have come down to us. They appeared in various magazines, and the first four were published in book form in 1831, when Gogol was twenty-two, the others a year later. They were at first accepted by the public as tales told by a village sacristan and written down by a beekeeper, Rudy Panko. Nothing like them had been seen in Russian before, and their freshness, spirit, and picturesque setting attracted attention at once.

To many Petersburg readers of that date the Ukraine must have been a country as unfamiliar as to us to-day. The beautiful scenery, the glorious summer, hot and sunny as in Italy, the exuberant fertility of the soil, the villages of neat white cottages and well-kept gardens, and the liveliness, sturdy independence and rollicking gaiety of the free peasants of the South make up a picture in striking contrast to the grey skies, the rows of thatched mud-coloured huts huddled together without a flower or a fruit bush, and the mournful apathy of the serfs of Great Russia, as we see them, for instance, in some of Turgenev's *Sportman's Sketches*.

Gogol had spent his life in the Ukraine up to the age of nineteen and he put the impressions and memories of childhood into these pictures of peasant life. In letters to his mother he appealed to her for descriptions of village customs, merry-makings and old-

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fashioned dress, as well as for the words of popular songs and ballads, and we find the details sent him in many passages, for example, in the account of the wedding in "Saint John's Eve." The popular superstitions are almost always treated, as by the peasants themselves, with a comic levity, free from all trace of scepticism. The devil, while a danger to be reckoned with, is always an object of derision and is usually made a fool of, as in "Christmas Eve," a story based on the popular legend "The Blacksmith and the Devil." The one exception is the tale "A Terrible Revenge," which is written in a high-flown romantic style, curiously different from the humorous realism of the others. It is a less successful effort in the style which Gogol employed later on in the celebrated Cossack romance *Taras Bulba*.

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PART ONE

P R E F A C E

"WHAT oddity is this: *Evenings in a village near Di-kanka?* What sort of *Evenings* have we here? And thrust into the world by a bee-keeper! Mercy on us! As though geese enough had not been plucked for pens and rags turned into paper! As though folks enough of all classes had not covered their fingers with ink-stains! The whim must take a bee-keeper to follow their example! Really, there is such a lot of paper nowadays that it takes time to think what to wrap in it."

I had a foreboding in my heart of all this talk a month ago. In fact, for a villager like me to poke his nose out of his hole into the great world—is, merciful heavens, just like what happens if you go into the apartments of some great lord: they all come round you and make you feel like a fool; it would not matter so much if it were only the upper servants, but no, some wretched little whipper-snapper loitering in the backyard pesters you too; and on all sides they begin stamping at you and asking: "Where are you going? Where? What for? Get out, peasant, out you go!" I can tell you. . . . But what's the use of talking! I would rather go twice a year into Mirgorod where the district court assessor and the reverend Father have not seen me for the last five years, than show myself in the great world; still, if you do it, whether you regret it or not, you must face the consequences.

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At home, dear readers—no offence meant (you may be annoyed at a bee-keeper like me addressing you so simply, as though I were speaking to some old friend or crony)—at home in the village it has always been the peasants' habit, as soon as the work in the fields is over, to climb up on the stove and rest there all the winter, and we bee-keepers put our bees away in a dark cellar. At the season when you see no cranes in the sky nor pears on the trees, there is sure to be a light burning somewhere at the end of the village as soon as evening comes on, laughter and singing is heard in the distance, there is the twang of the balalaika and at times of the fiddle, talk and noise. . . . Those are our *evening parties!* As you see they are like your balls, though not altogether so, I must say. If you go to balls, it is to move your legs and yawn with your hand over your mouth; while with us the girls gather together into one cottage, not for a ball, but with their distaff and carding-comb. And at first one may say they do work; the distaffs hum, there is a constant flow of song, and no one looks up from her work; but as soon as the lads burst into the cottage with the fiddler, there is an uproar at once, fun begins, they set off dancing, and I could not tell you all the pranks that are played.

But best of all is when they crowd together and fall to guessing riddles or simply babble. Goodness, what stories they tell! What tales of old times they unearth! What terrible things they describe! But nowhere are such stories told as in the cottage of the bee-keeper Rudy Panko. Why the villagers call me Rudy Panko, I really cannot say. My hair, I fancy, is more grey nowadays than red. But think what you

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like of it, it is our habit—when a nickname has once been given, it sticks to a man all his life. Good people meet together at the bee-keeper's on the eve of a holiday, sit down to the table—and then you have only to listen! And I may say, the guests are by no means of the humbler sort, mere peasants; their visit would be an honour for some one of more consequence than a bee-keeper. For instance, do you know the sacristan of the Dikanka church, Foma Grigoryevitch? Ah, he has a head! What stories he can reel off! You will find two of them in this book. He never wears one of those homespun dressing-gowns that you so often see on village sacristans; no, if you go to see him, even on working days he will always receive you in a gaberdine of fine cloth of the colour of cold potato mash, for which he paid almost six roubles a yard at Poltava. As for his high boots, no one in the village has ever said that they smelt of tar; every one knows that he rubs them with the very best fat, such as I believe many a peasant would be glad to put in his porridge. Nor would any one ever say that he wipes his nose on the skirt of his gaberdine, as many men of his calling do; no, he takes from his bosom a clean, neatly folded white handkerchief embroidered on the hem with red cotton, and after putting it to its proper use, folds it up in twelve as his habit is, and puts it back in his bosom.

And one of the visitors. . . . Well, he is such a fine young gentleman that you might take him for an assessor or a kammerherr any minute. Sometimes he would hold up his finger, and looking at the tip of it, begin telling a story—as choicely and cleverly as though it were printed in a book! Sometimes you

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listen and listen and begin to be puzzled. You can't make head or tail of it, not if you were to hang for it. Where did he pick up such words? Foma Grigoryevitch once told him a funny story in mockery of this. He told him how a student who had been having lessons from a deacon came back to his father such a Latin scholar that he had forgotten our orthodox tongue: he put *us* on the end of all the words; a spade was *spadus*, a female was *femalus*. It happened one day that he went with his father in the fields. The Latin scholar saw a rake and asked his father: "What do you call that, father?" And without looking what he was doing he stepped on the teeth of the rake. Before the father had time to answer the handle flew up and hit the lad on the head. "The damned rake!" he cried, putting his hand to his forehead and jumping half a yard into the air, "may the devil shove its father off a bridge, how it can hit one!" So he remembered the name, you see, poor fellow!

Such a tale was not to the taste of our ingenious story-teller. He rose from his seat without speaking, stood in the middle of the room with his legs apart, craned his head forward a little, thrust his hand into the back pocket of his pea-green coat, took out his round lacquer snuff-box, slipped on the face of some Mussulman general, and taking a good pinch of snuff powdered with wood-ash and leaves of lovage, crooked his elbow, lifted it to his nose and sniffed the whole pinch up with no help from his thumb—and still without a word. And it was only when he felt in another pocket and brought out a checked blue cotton handkerchief that he muttered the saying, I believe it was, "Cast not thy pearls before swine." "There's bound

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to be a quarrel," I thought, seeing that Foma Grigoryevitch's fingers seemed moving as though to make a long nose. Fortunately my old woman chose the moment to set butter and hot roll on the table. We all set to work upon it. Foma Grigoryevitch's hand instead of forming a rude gesture stretched out for the hot roll, and as always happened they all began praising the skill of my wife.

We have another story-teller, but he (night is not the time to think of him!) has such a store of terrible stories that it makes the hair stand up on one's head. I have purposely omitted them; good people might be so scared that they would be afraid of the bee-keeper, as though he were the devil, God forgive me. If, please God, I live to the New Year and bring out another volume, then I might frighten my readers with the ghosts and marvels that were seen in old days in our Christian country. Among them, maybe, you will find some tales told by the bee-keeper himself to his grand-children. If only people will read and listen I have enough of them stored away for ten volumes, I daresay, if only I am not too damned lazy to rack my brains for them.

But there, I have forgotten what is most important: when you come to see me, gentlemen, take the high road straight to Dikanka. I have put the name on my title-page on purpose that our village may be more easily found. You have heard enough about Dikanka, I have no doubt, and indeed there is a house there finer than the bee-keeper's cottage: and, I need say nothing about the park: I don't suppose you would find anything like it in your Petersburg. When you reach Dikanka you need only ask any little boy in a

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dirty shirt minding geese: "Where does the bee-keeper, Rudy Panko, live?" "Yonder," he will say, pointing with his finger, and if you like he will lead you to the village. But there is one thing I must ask you, not to walk here lost in thought, nor to be too clever, in fact, for our village roads are not so smooth as those before your mansions. The year before last Foma Grigoryevitch driving from Dikanka fell into a ditch, with his new trap and bay mare and all, though he was driving himself and put on a pair of spectacles too.

But, when you do arrive, we will give you melons such as you have never tasted in your life, I expect; and you will find no better honey in any village, I will take my oath on that. Just fancy, when you bring in the comb the scent in the room is something you can't imagine; it is clear as a tear or a costly crystal such as you see in ear-rings. And what pies my old woman will feed you on! What pies, if only you knew: simply sugar, perfect sugar! And the butter fairly melts on your lips when you begin to eat them. Really, when one comes to think of it, what can't these women do! Have you, friends, ever tasted pear kvass flavoured with sloes, or raisin and plum vodka? Or frumenty with milk? Good heavens, what dainties there are in the world! As soon as you begin eating them, it is a treat and no mistake: too good for words! Last year. . . . But how I am running on! Only come, make haste and come; and we will give you such good things that you will talk about them to every one you meet.

RUDY PANKO,
Bee-keeper.

THE FAIR AT SOROTCHINTSY

I

I am weary of the cottage,
Oie, take me from my home,
To where there's noise and bustle,
To where the girls are dancing gaily,
Where the lads are making merry!

(From an old ballad.)

HOW intoxicating, how magnificent is a summer day in Little Russia! How luxuriously warm the hours when midday glitters in stillness and sultry heat and the blue fathomless ocean arching like a voluptuous cupola over the plain seems to be slumbering, bathed in languor, clasping the fair earth and holding it close in its ethereal embrace! Upon it, not a cloud; in the plain, not a sound. Everything might be dead; only above in the heavenly depths a lark is trilling and from the airy heights the silvery notes drop down upon adoring earth, and from time to time the cry of a gull or the ringing note of a quail sounds in the steppe. The towering oaks stand, idle and apathetic, like aimless wayfarers, and the dazzling gleams of sunshine light up picturesque masses of leaves, casting on to others a shadow black as night, only flecked with gold when the wind blows. The insects of the air flit like sparks of emerald, topaz and

ruby about the gay kitchen gardens, topped by stately sunflowers. Grey haystacks and golden sheaves of corn are ranged like tents on the plain and stray over its immensity. The broad branches of cherries, of plums, apples and pears bent under their load of fruit, the sky with its pure mirror—the river in its green proudly erect frame . . . how full of voluptuousness and languor is the Little Russian Summer!

Such was the splendour of a day in the hot August of eighteen hundred . . . eighteen hundred . . . yes, it will be thirty years ago, while the road eight miles beyond the village of Sorotchintsy bustled with people hurrying to the fair from all the farms, far and near. From early morning waggons full of fish and salt had trailed in an endless chain along the road. Mountains of pots wrapped in hay moved along slowly, as though weary of being shut up in the dark; only here and there a brightly-painted tureen or crock boastfully peeped out from behind the hurdle that held the high pile on the waggon, and attracted longing glances from the devotees of such luxury. Many of the passers-by looked enviously at the tall potter, the owner of these treasures, who walked slowly behind his goods, carefully wrapping his flaunting and coquettish crocks in the detestable hay.

On one side of the road, apart from all the rest, a team of weary oxen dragged a waggon, piled up with sacks, hemp, linen and various homely goods, and followed by their owner, in a clean linen shirt and dirty linen trousers. With a lazy hand he wiped from his swarthy face the streaming perspiration that even trickled from his long moustaches, powdered by the relentless barber who uninvited visits fair and foul

alike and has for thousands of years forcibly powdered all mankind. Beside him, tied to the waggon, walked a mare, whose meek air betrayed her advancing years.

Many of the passers-by, especially the young men, took off their caps as they met our peasant. But it was not his grey moustaches or his dignified step which led them to do so; one had but to raise one's eyes a little to discover the explanation of this deference: on the waggon was sitting a pretty daughter, with a round face, black eyebrows arching evenly above her clear brown eyes, carelessly smiling rosy lips, with red and blue ribbons twisted in the long plaits which with a bunch of wild flowers crowned her charming head. Everything seemed to interest her; everything was new and wonderful . . . and her pretty eyes were racing all the time from one object to another. She might well be diverted! It was her first visit to a fair! A girl of eighteen for the first time at a fair! . . . But none of the passers-by knew what it had cost her to persuade her father to bring her, though he would have been ready enough but for her spiteful stepmother, who had learned to manage him as cleverly as he drove his old mare, now as a reward for long years of service being taken to be sold. The irrepressible woman. . . . But we are forgetting that she, too, was sitting on the top of the load dressed in a smart green woollen pelisse, adorned with little tails, to imitate ermine, though they were red in colour, in a gorgeous *plabta*¹ checked like a chess-board, and a flowered chintz cap that gave a particularly majestic air to her fat red face, the ex-

¹ Little Russian women wore a skirt made of two separate pieces of material, only held together by the girdle at the waist; the front breadth was the *zapaska*, and the back breadth the *plabta*.—(Translator's Note.)

pression of which betrayed something so unpleasant and savage that every one hastened in alarm to turn from her to the bright face of her daughter.

The river Rsyol gradually came into our traveller's view; already in the distance they felt its cool freshness the more welcome after the exhausting, wearisome heat. Through the dark and light green foliage of the birches and poplars, carelessly scattered over the plain, there were glimpses of the cold glitter of the water, and the lovely river unveiled its shining silvery bosom, over which the green tresses of the trees drooped luxuriantly. Wilful as a beauty in those enchanting hours when her faithful mirror so jealously frames her brow full of pride and dazzling splendour, her lily shoulders and her marble neck, shrouded by the dark waves of her hair, when with disdain she flings aside one ornament to replace it by another and there is no end to her whims—the river almost every year changes its course, picks out a new channel and surrounds itself with new and varied scenes. Rows of watermills tossed up great waves with their heavy wheels, and flung them violently down again, churning them into foam, scattering froth and making a great clatter. At that moment the waggon with the persons we have described reached the bridge, and the river lay before them in all its beauty and grandeur like a sheet of glass. Sky, green and dark blue forest, men, waggons of pots, watermills—all were standing or walking upside-down, and not sinking into the lovely blue depths.

Our fair maiden mused gazing at the glorious view, and even forgot to crack the sunflower seeds with which she had been busily engaged all the way, when all at

once the words, "I say what a girl!" caught her ear. Looking round she saw a group of lads standing on the bridge, of whom one, dressed rather more smartly than the others in a white jacket and grey astrakhan cap, was jauntily looking at the passers-by with his arms akimbo. The girl could not but notice his sunburnt but pleasing face and glowing eyes, which seemed striving to look right through her, and she dropped her eyes at the thought that he might have uttered those words.

"A fine girl!" the young man in the white jacket went on, keeping his eyes fixed on her. "I'd give all I have to kiss her. And there's a devil sitting in front!"

There were peals of laughter all round; but the slow-moving peasant's gaily dressed wife was not pleased at such a greeting: her red cheeks blazed and a torrent of choice language fell like rain on the head of the wanton youth.

"Plague take you, you rascally bargee! May your father crack his head on a pot! May he slip down on the ice, the confounded antichrist! May the devil singe his beard in the next world!"

"I say, isn't she swearing!" said the young man staring at her, as though puzzled at such a sharp volley of unexpected greetings, "and she can bring her tongue to utter words like that, the witch! She is a hundred if she is a day!"

"A hundred!" the elderly charmer caught him up. "You infidel! go and wash your face! You worthless scamp! I've never seen your mother, but I know she's good for nothing. And your father is good for nothing, and your aunt is good for nothing! A hundred, indeed! Why, the milk is scarcely dry on his . . ."

At that moment the waggon began to go down from the bridge and the last words could not be heard; but without stopping to think he picked up a handful of mud and threw it at her. The throw achieved more than he could have hoped: the new chintz cap was spattered all over and the laughter of the rowdy scamps was louder than ever. The buxom charmer was boiling with rage; but by this time the waggon was far away, and she wreaked her vengeance on her innocent stepdaughter and her slow husband, who, long since accustomed to such onslaughts, preserved a stubborn silence and received the tempestuous language of his wrathful spouse with indifference. In spite of that her indefatigable tongue went on clacking until they reached the house of their old friend and crony the Cossack Tsybulya on the outskirts of the village. The meeting of the old friends, who had not seen each other for a long time, put this unpleasant incident out of their minds for a while, as our travellers talked of the fair and rested after their long journey.

II

Good gracious me! what isn't there at that fair! wheels, window-panes, tar, tobacco, straps, onions, all sorts of haberdashery . . . so that even if you had thirty roubles in your purse you could not buy up all the fair. (*From a Little Russian Farce.*)

You have no doubt heard a rushing waterfall when everything is quivering and filled with uproar, and a chaos of strange vague sounds floats like a whirlwind round you. Are you not instantly overcome by the same feelings in the turmoil of the village fair, when

all the people are melted into one huge monster all of whose body is stirring in the market-place and the narrow streets, with shouting, laughing and clatter? Noise, swearing, bellowing, bleating, roaring—all blend into one discordant uproar. Oxen, sacks, hay, gypsies, pots, peasant-women, cakes, caps—everything is bright, gaudy, discordant, flitting in groups, shifting to and fro before your eyes. The different voices drown one another, and not a single word can be caught, can be saved from the deluge; not one cry is distinct. Only the clapping of hands after each bargain is heard on all sides. A waggon breaks down, there is the clank of iron, the thud of boards thrown on to the ground, and one's head is so dizzy one does not know which way to turn.

The peasant whose acquaintance we have already made had been for some time elbowing his way through the crowd with his black-browed daughter; he went up to one waggon-load, fingered another, inquired the prices; and meanwhile his thoughts kept revolving round his ten sacks of wheat and the old mare he had brought to sell. From his daughter's face it could be seen that she was not over pleased to be dawdling by the waggons of flour and wheat. She longed to be where red ribbons, ear-rings, crosses made of copper and pewter and coins were smartly displayed under linen awnings. But even where she was she found many objects worthy of notice: she was much diverted at the sight of a gypsy and a peasant, who clapped hands so that they both cried out with pain; of a drunken Jew slapping a woman on the back; of huckster-women quarrelling with words of abuse and gestures of contempt; of a Great Russian with one

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hand stroking his goat's beard, with another. . . . But at that moment she felt some one pull her by the embroidered sleeve of her smock. She looked round—and the bright-eyed young man in the white jacket stood before her. She started and her heart throbbed, as it had never done before at any joy or grief; it seemed strange and delightful, and she could not make out what had happened to her.

"Don't be frightened, dear heart, don't be frightened!" he said to her in a low voice, taking her hand. "I'll say nothing to hurt you!"

"Perhaps it is true that you will say nothing to hurt me," the girl thought to herself; "only it is strange . . . it might be the Evil One! One knows that it is not right . . . but I haven't the strength to take away my hand."

The peasant looked round and was about to say something to his daughter, but on the other side he heard the word "wheat." That magic word instantly made him join two dealers who were talking loudly, and riveted his attention upon them so that nothing could have distracted it. This is what the corn-dealers were saying.

III

Do you see what a fellow he is?
Not many such as he in the world.
Tosses off vodka like beer!

(KOTLYAREVSKY, *Æneid*.)

"So you think, neighbour, that our wheat won't sell well?" said a man, who looked like an artisan of some big village, in dirty tar-stained trousers of coarse

THE FAIR AT SOROTCHINTSY

homespun material, to another, with a big swelling on his forehead, wearing a dark blue jacket patched in parts.

"It's not a matter of thinking: I am ready to put a halter round my neck and hang from that tree like a sausage in the cottage before Christmas, if we sell a single bushel."

"What nonsense are you talking, neighbour? No wheat has been brought except ours," answered the man in the homespun trousers.

"Yes, you may say what you like," thought the father of our beauty, who had not missed a single word of the dealer's conversation. "I have ten sacks here in reserve."

"Well, you see it's like this, if there is any devilry mixed up in a thing, you will get no more profit from it than a hungry soldier," the man with the swelling on his forehead said significantly.

"What do you mean by devilry?" retorted the man in the homespun trousers.

"Did you hear what people are saying?" went on he of the swelled forehead, giving him a sidelong look out of his morose eyes.

"Well?"

"Ah, you may say, well! The assessor, may he never wipe his lips again after the gentry's plum brandy, has set aside an evil spot for the fair, where you may burst before you get rid of a single grain. Do you see that old tumble-down barn which stands yonder, see, under the hill?" (At this point the inquisitive peasant went closer and was all attention.) "All manner of devilish tricks go on in that barn, and not a single fair has taken place in this spot without

trouble. The parish clerk passed it late last night and all of a sudden a pig's snout looked out at the window of the loft, and grunted so that it sent a shiver down his back. You may be sure that the *red jacket* will be seen again!"

"What's that about a red jacket?"

Our attentive listener's hair stood up on his head at these words. He looked round in alarm and saw that his daughter and the young man were calmly standing in each other's arms, murmuring soft nothings to each other and oblivious of every coloured jacket in the world. This dispelled his terror and restored his equanimity.

"Aha-ha-ha, neighbour! You know how to hug a girl, it seems! I had been married three days before I learned to hug my poor dear Hveska, and I owed that to a friend who was my best man: he gave me a hint."

The youth saw at once that his fair one's father was not very quick-witted, and began making a plan for disposing him in his favour.

"I believe you don't know me, good friend, but I recognized you at once."

"Maybe you did."

"If you like I'll tell you your name and your surname and everything about you: your name is Solopy Tcherevik."

"Yes, Solopy Tcherevik."

"Well, have a good look: don't you know me?"

"No, I don't know you. No offence meant: I've seen so many faces of all sorts in my day, how the devil can one remember them all?"

"I am sorry you don't remember Golopupenko's son!"

"Why, is Ohrim your father?"

"Who else? The bald grandad,¹ maybe, if he's not!"

At this the friends took off their caps and proceeded to kiss each other; our Golopupenko's son made up his mind, however, to attack his new acquaintance without loss of time.

"Well, Solopy, you see, your daughter and I have so taken to each other that we are ready to spend our lives together."

"Well, Paraska," said Tcherevik, laughing and turning to his daughter; "maybe you really might, as they say . . . you and he . . . graze on the same grass! Come, shall we shake hands on it? And now, my new son-in-law, stand me a glass!"

And all three found themselves in the famous refreshment-bar of the fair—a Jewess's booth, adorned with a numerous flotilla of stoups, bottles and flasks of every kind and description.

"Well, you are a smart fellow! I like you for that," said Tcherevik a little exhilarated, seeing how his intended son-in-law filled a pint mug and, without winking an eyelash, toss it off at a gulp, flinging down the mug afterwards and smashing it to bits. "What do you say, Paraska? Haven't I found you a fine husband? Look, look how smartly he takes his drink!"

And laughing and staggering he went with her towards his waggon; while our young man made his way to the booths where fancy goods were displayed, where there were even dealers from Gadyatch and Mirgorod, the two famous towns of the province of Poltava, to pick out the best wooden pipe in a smart

¹ *I.e.* the devil.—(Translator's Note.)

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copper setting, a flowered red kerchief and cap, for wedding presents to his father-in-law and every one else who must have one.

IV

If it's a man, it's no matter,
But if there's a woman, you see
There is need to please her.

(KOTLYAREVSKY.)

"Well wife, I have found a husband for my daughter!"

"This is a moment to look for husbands, I must say! You are a fool—a fool! It must have been ordained at your birth that you should remain one! Whoever has seen, whoever has heard of such a thing as a decent man running after husbands at a time like this? You had much better be thinking how to get your corn off your hands. A nice young man he must be, too! I expect he is the shabbiest scarecrow in the place!"

"Oh, not a bit of it! You should see what a lad he is! His jacket alone is worth more than your pelisse and red boots. And how he takes his vodka! The devil confound me and you too if ever I have seen a lad before toss off a pint without winking!"

"To be sure, if he is a drunkard and a vagabond he is a man after your own heart. I wouldn't mind betting it's the very same rascal who pestered us on the bridge. I am sorry I haven't come across him yet: I'd let him know."

"Well, Hivrya, what if it were the same: why is he a rascal?"

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"Eh! Why is he a rascal? Ah, you addle-pate! Do you hear? Why is he a rascal? Where were your stupid eyes when we were driving past the mills? They might insult his wife here, right before his snuffy nose, and he would not care a hang!"

"I see no harm in him, anyway: he is a fine fellow! Only maybe, that he plastered your face with dung."

"Aha! I see you won't let me say a word! What's the meaning of it? It's not like you! You must have managed to get a drop before you have sold anything."

Here Tcherevik himself realised that he had said too much and instantly put his hands over his head, doubtless expecting that his wrathful spouse would promptly seize his hair in her wifely claws.

"Go to the devil! So much for our wedding!" he thought to himself, retreating before his wife's attack. "I shall have to refuse a good fellow for no rhyme or reason. Merciful God! Why didst Thou send such a plague on us poor sinners? With so many nasty things in the world, Thou must needs go and create women!"

V

Droop not, plane tree,
Still art thou green.
Fret not, little Cossack,
Still art thou young.

(*Little Russian Song.*)

The lad in the white jacket sitting by his waggon gazed absent-mindedly at the crowd that moved noisily

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about him. The weary sun after blazing through morning and noon was tranquilly withdrawing from the earth, and the daylight was going out in a bright seductive glow. The tops of the white booths and tents stood out with dazzling brightness, suffused in a faint rosy tint of fiery light. The panes in the window-frames piled up for sale glittered; the green goblets and bottles on the tables in the drinking-booths flashed like fire; the heaps of melons and pumpkins looked as though they were cast in gold and dark copper. There was less talk, and the weary tongues of higglers, peasants and gypsies moved more slowly and deliberately. Here and there lights began gleaming, and savoury steam from boiling dumplings floated over the hushed streets.

"What are you grieving over, Grytsko?" a tall sunburnt gypsy cried, slapping our young friend on the shoulder. "Come, let me have your oxen for twenty roubles!"

"It's naught but oxen and oxen with you. All that you gypsies care for is gain; cheating and deceiving honest folk!"

"Tfoo, the devil! You do seem to be in trouble! You are vexed at having tied yourself up with a girl, maybe?"

"No, that's not my way: I keep my word; what I have once done stands for ever. But it seems that old screw Tcherevik has not a half pint of conscience: he gave his word, but he has taken it back. . . . Well, it is no good blaming him: he is a blockhead and that's the fact. It's all the doing of that old witch whom we lads jeered at on the bridge to-day! Ah, if I

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were the Tsar or some great lord I would first hang all the fools who let themselves be saddled by women. . . ."

"Well, will you let the oxen go for twenty, if we make Tcherevik give you Paraska?"

Grytsko stared at him in surprise. There was a look spiteful, malicious, ignoble and at the same time haughty in the gypsy's swarthy face: any man looking at him would have recognised that there were great qualities in that strange soul, though their only reward on earth would be the gallows. The mouth, completely sunken between the nose and the pointed chin and for ever curved in a mocking smile, the little eyes that gleamed like fire and the lightning flashes of intrigue and enterprise for ever flitting over his face—all this seemed in keeping with the strange costume he wore. The dark brown full coat, which looked as though it would drop into dust at a touch; the long black hair that fell in tangled tresses on his shoulders; the shoes on his bare sunburnt feet, all seemed to be in character and part of him.

"I'll let you have them for fifteen, not twenty, if only you don't deceive me!" the young man answered, keeping his searching gaze fixed on the gypsy.

"Fifteen? Done! Mind you don't forget; fifteen! Here is a blue note as a pledge!"

"But if you deceive me?"

"If I do, the pledge is yours!"

"Right! Well, let us shake hands on the bargain!"

"Let us!"

What a misfortune! Roman is coming; here he is, he'll give me a drubbing in a minute; and you, too, master Homo, will not get off without trouble. (From a Little Russian Comedy.)

"This way, Afanassy Ivanovitch! The fence is lower here, put your foot up and don't be afraid: my fool has gone off for the night with his crony to the waggons to see that the Great Russians don't filch anything but ill-luck."

So Tcherevik's formidable spouse fondly encouraged the priest's son who was faint-heartedly clinging to the fence. He soon climbed on to the top and stood there for some time in hesitation, like a long terrible phantom, looking where he could best jump and at last coming down with a crash among the rank weeds.

"How dreadful! I hope you have not hurt yourself? Please God, you've not broken your neck!" Hivrya faltered anxiously.

"Sh! It's all right, it's all right, dear Havronya Nikiforovna," the priest's son brought out in a painful whisper, getting on to his feet, "except for being afflicted by the nettles, that serpent-like weed, to use the words of our late head priest."

"Let us go into the house; there is nobody there. I was beginning to think you were ill or asleep, Afanassy Ivanovitch: you did not come and did not come. How are you? I hear that your honoured father has had a run of good luck!"

"Nothing to speak of, Havronya Nikiforovna: during the whole fast father has received nothing but fifteen sacks of spring corn, four sacks of millet, a

hundred buns; and as for fowls they don't run up to fifty, and the eggs were mostly rotten. But the truly sweet offerings, so to say, can only come from you Havronya Nikiforovna!" the priest's son continued with a tender glance at her as he edged nearer.

"Here is an offering for you, Afanassy Ivanovitch!" she said, setting some bowls on the table and coyly fastening the buttons of her jacket as though they had not been undone on purpose, "curd dough-nuts, wheaten dumplings, buns and cakes!"

"I bet they have been made by the cleverest hands of any daughter of Eve!" said the priest's son, setting to work upon the cakes and with the other hand drawing the curd dough-nuts towards him. "Though indeed, Havronya Nikiforovna, my heart thirsts for a gift from you sweeter than any buns or dumplings!"

"Well, I don't know what dainty you will ask for next, Afanassy Ivanovitch!" answered the buxom beauty, pretending not to understand.

"Your love, of course, incomparable Havronya Nikiforovna!" the priest's son whispered, holding a curd dough-nut in one hand and encircling her ample waist with his arm.

"Goodness knows what you are thinking about, Afanassy Ivanovitch!" said Hivrya, bashfully casting down her eyes. "Why, you will be trying to kiss me next, I shouldn't wonder!"

"As for that, I must tell you," the young man went on. "When I was still at the seminary, I remember as though it were to-day . . ."

At that moment there was a sound of barking and a knock at the gate. Hivrya ran out quickly and came back looking pale.

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"Afanassy Ivanovitch, we are caught: there are a lot of people knocking, and I fancy I heard Tsybulya's voice. . . ."

The dough-nut stuck in the young man's throat. . . . His eyes almost started out of his head, as though some one had just come from the other world to visit him.

"Climb up here!" cried the panic-stricken Hivrya, pointing to some boards that lay across the rafter just below the ceiling, loaded with all sorts of domestic odds and ends.

Danger gave our hero courage. Recovering a little, he clambered on the stove and from there clambered cautiously on to the boards, while Hivrya ran headlong to the gate, as the knocking was getting louder and more insistent.

VII

But here are miracles, gentlemen!

(*From a Little Russian Comedy.*)

A strange incident had taken place at the fair; there were rumours all over the place that the *red jacket* had been seen somewhere among the wares. The old woman who sold bread-rings fancied she saw the devil in the shape of a pig, bending over the waggons as though looking for something. The news soon flew to every corner of the now resting camp, and every one would have thought it a crime to disbelieve it, in spite of the fact that the bread-ring seller, whose stall was next to the drinking-booth, had been staggering about all day and could not walk straight. To this was added the story—by now greatly exaggerated—

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of the marvel seen by the district clerk in the tumble-down barn; so towards night people were all huddling together; their peace of mind was destroyed, and every one was too terrified to close an eye; while those who were not cast in an heroic mould and had secured a night's lodging in a cottage, made their way homewards. Among the latter were Tcherevik with his daughter and his friend Tsybulya, and they, together with the friends who had offered to keep them company, were responsible for the loud knocking that had so alarmed Hivrya. Tsybulya was already a little exhilarated. This could be seen from his twice driving round the yard with his waggon before he could find the cottage. His guests, too, were all rather merry, and they unceremoniously pushed into the cottage before their host. Our Tcherevik's wife sat as though on thorns, when they began rummaging in every corner of the cottage.

"Well, gossip," cried Tsybulya as he entered, "you are still shaking with fever?"

"Yes, I am not well," answered Hivrya, looking uneasily towards the boards on the rafters.

"Come, wife, get the bottle out of the waggon!" said Tsybulya to his wife, who came in with him, "we will empty it with these good folk, for the damned women have given us such a scare that one is ashamed to own it. Yes, mates, there was really no sense in our coming here!" he went on, taking a pull out of an earthenware jug. "I don't mind betting a new cap that the women thought they would have a laugh at us. Why, if it were Satan—who's Satan? Spit on him! If he stood here before me this very minute, I'll be damned if I wouldn't make a long nose at him!"

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"Why did you turn so pale, then?" cried one of the visitors, who was a head taller than any of the rest and tried on every occasion to display his valour.

"I? . . . Lord bless you! Are you dreaming?"

The visitors laughed; the boastful hero smiled complacently.

"As though he could turn pale now!" put in another; "his cheeks are as red as a poppy; he is not a Tsybulya¹ now, but a beetroot—or, rather, the *red jacket* itself that frightened us all so."

The bottle went the round of the table, and made the visitors more exhilarated than ever. At this point Tcherevik, greatly exercised about the *red jacket* which would not let his inquisitive mind rest, appealed to his friend:

"Come, mate, kindly tell me! I keep asking about this damned *jacket* and can get no answer from any one!"

"Eh, mate, it's not a thing to talk about at night; however, to satisfy you and these good friends" (saying this he turned towards his guests), "who want, I see, to know about these strange doings as much as you do. Well, so be it. Listen!"

Here he scratched his shoulder, mopped his face with the skirt of his coat, leaned both arms on the table, and began:

"Once upon a time a devil was kicked out of hell, what for I cannot say . . ."

"How so, mate?" Tcherevik interrupted. "How could it come about that a devil was turned out of hell?"

"I can't help it, mate, if he was turned out, he was—as a peasant turns a dog out of his cottage. Perhaps

¹ The word means "onion."—(Translator's Note.)

a whim came over him to do a good deed—and so they showed him the door. And the poor devil was so homesick, so homesick for hell that he was ready to hang himself. Well, there was nothing for it. In his trouble he took to drink. He settled in the tumble-down barn which you have seen at the bottom of the hill and which no good man will pass now without making the sign of the cross as a safeguard; and the devil became such a rake you would not find another like him among the lads: he sat day and night in the pot-house!"

At this point the severe Tcherevik interrupted again:

"Goodness knows what you are saying, mate! How could any one let a devil into a pot-house? Why, thank God, he has claws on his paws and horns on his head."

"Ah, that was just it—he had a cap and gloves on. Who could recognise him? Well, he kept it up till he drank away all he had with him. They gave him credit for a long time, but at last they would give no more. The devil had to pawn his red jacket for less than a third of its value to the Jew who sold vodka in those days at Sorotchintsy. He pawned it and said to him: 'Mind now, Jew, I shall come to you for my jacket in a year's time; take care of it!' And he disappeared and no more was seen of him. The Jew examined the coat thoroughly: the cloth was better than anything you could get in Mirgorod, and the red of it glowed like fire, so that one could not take one's eyes off it! And it seemed to the Jew a long time to wait till the end of the year. He scratched his curls and got nearly five gold pieces for it from a gentleman who was passing by. The Jew forgot all about

the date fixed. But all of a sudden one evening a man turns up: 'Come, Jew, hand me over my jacket!' At first the Jew did not know him, but afterwards when he had had a good look at him, he pretended he had never seen him before. 'What jacket? I have no jacket. I know nothing about your jacket!' The other walked away; only, when the Jew locked himself up in his room and, after counting over the money in his chests, flung a sheet round his shoulders and began saying his prayers in Jewish fashion, all at once he heard a rustle. . . . And there were pigs' snouts looking in at every window."

At that moment an indistinct sound not unlike the grunt of a pig was audible; every one turned pale. . . . Drops of sweat stood out on Tsybulya's face.

"What was it?" cried the panic-stricken Tcherevik.

"Nothing," answered Tsybulya, trembling all over.

"Eh?" responded one of the guests.

"Did you speak?"

"No!"

"Who was it grunted?"

"God knows why are we in such a fluster! It's nothing!"

They all looked about fearfully and began rummaging in the corners. Hivrya was more dead than alive.

"Oh, you are a set of women!" she brought out aloud. "You are not fit to be Cossacks and men! You ought to sit spinning and heckling yarn! Maybe some one misbehaved, God forgive me, or some one's bench creaked, and you are all in a fluster as though you were crazy!"

This put our heroes to shame and made them pull

themselves together. Tsybulya took a pull at the jug and went on with his story.

"The Jew fainted with terror; but the pigs with legs as long as stilts climbed in at the windows and so revived him in a trice with plaited thongs, making him skip higher than this ceiling. The Jew fell at their feet and confessed everything. . . . Only the jacket could not be restored in a hurry. The gentleman had been robbed of it on the road by a gypsy who sold it to a pedlar-woman, and she brought it back again to the fair at Sorotchintsy; but no one would buy anything from her after that. The woman wondered and wondered and at last saw what it was; there was no doubt the red jacket was at the bottom of it; it was not for nothing that she had felt stifled when she put it on. Without stopping to think she flung it in the fire—the devilish thing would not burn! . . . 'Ah, that's a gift from the devil!' she thought. The woman managed to thrust it into the waggon of a peasant who had come to the fair to sell his butter. The silly fellow was delighted; only no one would ask for his butter. 'Ah, it's an evil hand foisted that red jacket on me!' He took his axe and chopped it into bits; he looked at it—and each bit joined up to the next till the jacket was whole again! Crossing himself, he went at it with the axe again, he flung the bits all over the place and went away. Only ever since then, just at the time of the fair, the devil walks all over the market-place with the face of a pig, grunting and collecting the scraps of his jacket. Now they say there is only the left sleeve missing. Folk have fought shy of the place ever since, and it is ten years

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since the fair has been held on it. But in an evil hour the assessor . . ."

The rest of the sentence died away on the speaker's lips: there was a loud rattle at the window, the panes fell tinkling on the floor, and a terrible pig's face looked in at the window rolling its eyes as though asking, "What are you doing here, good people?"

VIII

His tail between his legs like a dog,
Like Cain, trembling all over;
The snuff dropped from his nose.
(KOTLYAREVSKY, *Æneid*.)

Every one in the room was numb with horror. Tsybulya sat petrified with his mouth open; his eyes were almost flying out of his head like bullets; his outspread fingers stood motionless in the air. The valiant giant in overwhelming terror leapt up and struck his head against the rafter; the boards shifted, and with a thud and a crash the priest's son fell to the floor.

"Aïe, aïe, aïe!" one of the party screamed desperately, flopping on the locker in alarm, and waving his arms and legs.

"Save me!" wailed another, hiding his head under a sheepskin.

Tsybulya, roused from the stupefaction by this second horror, crept shuddering under his wife's skirts. The valiant giant climbed into the oven in spite of the narrowness of the opening, and closed the oven door on himself. And Tcherevik, clapping a basin on his head instead of a cap, dashed to the door as though

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he had been scalded, and ran through the streets like a lunatic, not knowing where he was going; only weariness caused him to slacken his pace. His heart was thumping like an oil press; streams of perspiration rolled down him. He was on the point of sinking to the ground in exhaustion when all at once he heard some one running after him. . . . His breath failed him.

"The devil! The devil!" he cried frantically, redoubling his efforts, and a minute later he fell unconscious on the ground.

"The devil! The devil!" came a shout behind him, and all he felt was something falling with a thud on the top of him. Then his senses deserted him and, like the dread inmate of a narrow coffin, he remained lying dumb and motionless in the middle of the road.

IX

In front, like any one else;
Behind, upon my soul, like a devil!
(From a Folk Tale.)

"Do you hear, Vlas?" one of the crowd asleep in the street said, sitting up, "some one spoke of the devil near us!"

"What is it to me?" the gypsy near him grumbled, stretching, "they may talk of all their kindred for aught I care!"

"But he bawled, you know, as though he were being strangled!"

"A man will cry out anything in his sleep!"

"Say what you like, we must have a look. Strike a light!"

The other gypsy, grumbling to himself, rose to his feet, sent a shower of sparks flying like lightning flashes, blew the tinder with his lips, and with a *kag-anets* in his hands—the usual Little Russian lamp consisting of a broken pot full of mutton fat—set off, lighting the way before him.

"Stop! There is something lying here! Show a light this way!"

Here they were joined by several others.

"What's lying there, Vlas?"

"Why, it looks like two men: one on top, the other under. Which of them is the devil I can't make out yet!"

"Why, who is on top?"

"A woman!"

"Oh, well, then that's the devil!"

A general shout of laughter roused almost the whole street.

"A woman astride of a man! I suppose she knows how to ride!" one of the bystanders exclaimed.

"Look, lads!" said another, picking up a broken piece of the basin of which only one half still remained on Tcherevik's head, "what a cap this fine fellow put on!"

The growing noise and laughter brought our corpses to life, and Tcherevik and his spouse, full of the panic they had passed through, gazed with staring eyes in terror at the swarthy faces of the gypsies; in the dim and flickering light they looked like a wild horde of gnomes bathed in the heavy fumes of the underworld, in the darkness of ever-slumbering night.

X

Fie upon you, out upon you, image of Satan!
(*A Little Russian Comedy.*)

The freshness of morning breathed over the awakening folk of Sorotchintsy. Clouds of smoke from all the chimneys floated to meet the rising sun. The fair began to hum with life. Sheep were bleating, horses neighing; the cackle of geese and pedlar-women sounded all over the encampment again—and terrible tales of the red jacket, which had roused such alarm in the mysterious hours of darkness, vanished with the return of morning.

Stretching and yawning, Tcherevik lay drowsily under his friend Tsybulya's thatched barn among oxen and sacks of flour and wheat. And apparently he had no desire to part with his dreams, when all at once he heard a voice, familiar as his own stove, the blessed refuge of his lazy hours, or as the pot-house kept by his cousin not ten paces from his own door.

"Get up, get up!" his tender spouse squeaked in his ear, tugging at his arm with all her might.

Tcherevik, instead of answering, blew out his cheeks and began waving his hands, as though beating a drum.

"Idiot!" she shouted, retreating out of reach of his arms, which almost struck her in the face.

Tcherevik sat up, rubbed his eyes and looked about him.

"The devil take me, my dear, if I didn't fancy your face was a drum on which I was forced to beat an

alarm, like a soldier, by those pig-faces that Tsybulya was telling us about. . . ."

"Give over talking nonsense, do! Go, make haste and take the mare to market! We are a laughing-stock, upon my word: we've come to the fair and not sold a handful of hemp. . . ."

"Of course, wife," Tcherevik assented, "they will laugh at us now, to be sure."

"Go along, go along! They are laughing at you as it is!"

"You see, I haven't washed yet," Tcherevik went on, yawning, scratching his back and trying to gain time.

"What a moment to be fussy about cleanliness! When have you cared about that? Here's the towel, wipe your ugly face."

Here she snatched up something that lay crumpled up—and darted back in horror: it was the cuff of a red jacket!

"Go along and get to work," she repeated, recovering herself, on seeing that her husband was motionless with terror and his teeth were chattering.

"A fine sale there will be now!" he muttered to himself as he untied the mare and led her to the market-place. "It was not for nothing that, while I was getting ready for this cursed fair, my heart was as heavy as though some one had put a dead cow on my back, and twice the oxen turned homewards of their own accord. And now I come to think of it, I do believe it was Monday when we started. And so everything has gone wrong! . . . And the cursed devil can never be satisfied: he might have worn his jacket without one sleeve—but no, he can't

let honest folk rest in peace. Now if I were the devil—God forbid—do you suppose I'd go hanging around at night after a lot of damned rags?"

Here our Tcherevik's meditations were interrupted by a thick harsh voice. Before him stood a tall gypsy.

"What have you for sale, good man?"

Tcherevik was silent for a moment; he looked at the gypsy from head to foot and said with unruffled composure, neither stopping nor letting go the bridle:

"You can see for yourself what I am selling."

"Harness?" said the gypsy, looking at the bridle which the other had in his hand.

"Yes, harness, if a mare is the same thing as harness."

"But devil take it, neighbour, one would think you had fed her on straw!"

"Straw?"

Here Tcherevik would have pulled at the bridle to lead his mare forward and convict the shameless slanderer of his lie; but his hand moved with extraordinary ease and struck his own chin. He looked—in it was a severed bridle, and tied to the bridle—oh horror! his hair stood up on his head—a piece of a red sleeve! . . . Spitting, crossing himself and brandishing his arms he ran away from the unexpected gift and, running faster than a young man, vanished in the crowd.

XI

For my own corn I have been beaten.

(*Proverb.*)

"Catch him! catch him!" cried several lads at a narrow street-corner, and Tcherevik felt himself suddenly seized by stalwart hands.

"Bind him! That's the fellow who stole an honest man's mare."

"God bless you! What are you binding me for?"

"Fancy his asking! Why did you want to steal a mare from a peasant at the fair, Tcherevik?"

"You're out of your wits, lads! Who has ever heard of a man stealing from himself?"

"That's an old trick! An old trick! Why were you running your hardest, as though the devil were on your heels?"

"Any one would run when the devil's garment . . ."

"Aie, my good soul, try that on others! You'll catch it yet from the court assessor, to teach you to go scaring people with tales of the devil."

"Catch him! catch him!" came a shout from the other end of the street. "There he is, there is the runaway!"

And Tcherevik beheld his friend Tsybulya in the most pitiful plight with his hands tied behind him, led along by several lads.

"Queer things are happening!" said one of them. "You should hear what this scoundrel says! You have only to look at his face to see he is a thief. When we set to asking him why he was running like one possessed, he says he put his hand in his pocket

and instead of his snuff pulled out a bit of the devil's jacket and it burst into a red flame—and he took to his heels!"

"Aha! why, these two are birds of a feather! We had better tie them together!"

XII

"In what am I to blame, good folks?"

"Why are you beating me?" said our poor wretch.

"Why are you falling upon me?"

"What for, what for?" he said, bursting into tears, Streams of bitter tears, and clutching at his sides.

(ARTEMOVSKY-GULAK, *Pan Ta Sobaka.*)

"Maybe you really have picked up something, mate?" Tcherevik asked, as he lay bound beside Tsybulya in a thatched shanty.

"You too, mate! May my arms and legs wither if ever I stole anything in my life, except maybe buns and cream from my mother, and that only before I was ten years old."

"Why has this trouble come upon us, mate? It's not so bad for you: you are charged, anyway, with stealing from somebody else; but what have I, unlucky wretch, done to deserve such a foul slander, as stealing my mare from myself? It seems, mate, it was written at our birth that we should have no luck!"

"Woe to us, forlorn and forsaken!"

At this point the two friends fell to weeping violently.

"What's the matter with you, Tcherevik?" said Grytsko, entering at that moment. "Who tied you up like that?"

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"Ah, Golopupenko, Golopupenko!" cried Tcherevik, delighted. "Here, mate, this is the lad I was telling you about. Ah, he is a smart one! God strike me dead on the spot if he did not toss off a whole jug, almost as big as your head, and never turned a hair!"

"What made you put a slight on such a fine lad, then, mate?"

"Here, you see," Tcherevik went on, addressing Grytsko, "God has punished me, it seems, for having wronged you. Forgive me, good lad! Upon my soul, I'd be glad to do anything for you. . . . But what would you have me do? There's the devil in my old woman!"

"I am not one to remember evil, Tcherevik! If you like, I'll set you free!"

Here he made a sign to the other lads, and the very ones who were guarding them ran to untie them.

"Then you must do your part, too: a wedding! And let us keep it up so that our legs ache with dancing for a year afterwards!"

"Good, good!" said Tcherevik, striking his hands together. "I feel as pleased as though the soldiers had carried off my old woman! Why give it another thought? Whether she likes it or not, the wedding shall be to-day—and that's all about it!"

"Mind now, Solopy: in an hour's time I will be with you; but now go home—there you will find purchasers for your mare and your wheat."

"What! has the mare been found?"

"Yes."

Tcherevik was struck dumb with joy and stood still, gazing after Grytsko.

"Well, Grytsko, have we mishandled the job?" said

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the tall gypsy to the hurrying lad. "The oxen are mine now, aren't they?"

"Yours! yours!"

XIII

Fear not, fear not, little mother,
Put on your red boots.
Trample your foes
Under foot
So that your ironshod
Heels may clang,
So that your foes
May be hushed and still.

(A Wedding Song.)

Paraska mused sitting alone in the cottage with her pretty chin propped on her hand. Many dreams hovered about her little head. At times a faint smile stirred her crimson lips and some joyful feeling lifted her dark brows, while at times a cloud of pensiveness set them frowning above her clear brown eyes.

"But what if it does not come true as he said?" she whispered with an expression of doubt. "What if they don't let me marry him? If . . . No, no; that will not be! My stepmother does just as she likes; why mayn't I do as I like? I've plenty of obstinacy too. How handsome he is! How wonderfully his black eyes glow! How delightfully he says, 'Paraska darling!' How his white jacket suits him! But his belt ought to be a bit brighter! . . . I will weave him one when we settle in a new cottage. I can't help being pleased when I think," she went on, taking from her bosom, a little red paper-framed looking-glass bought at the fair and gazing into it,

"how I shall meet her one day somewhere and she may burst before I bow to her, nothing will induce me. No, stepmother, you've beaten your stepdaughter for the last time. The sand will rise up on the rocks and the oak bend down to the water like a willow, before I bow down before you. But I was forgetting . . . let me try on a cap, if it has to be my stepmother's, and see how it suits me to look like a wife?"

Then she got up, holding the looking-glass in her hand and bending her head down to it, walked in excitement about the room, as though in dread of falling, seeing below her, instead of the floor, the ceiling with the boards laid on the rafters from which the priest's son had so lately dropped, and the shelves set with pots.

"Why, I am like a child," she cried, "afraid to take a step!"

And she began tapping with her feet—growing bolder as she went on; at last she laid her left hand on her hip and went off into a dance, clinking with her metalled heels, holding the looking-glass before her and singing her favourite song:

"Little green periwinkle,
Twine lower to me!
And you, black-browed dear one,
Come nearer to me!
Little green periwinkle,
Twine lower to me!
And you, black-browed dear one,
Come nearer to me!"

At that moment Tcherevik peeped in at the door, and seeing his daughter dancing before the looking-glass, he stood still. For a long time he looked, laugh-

ing at the innocent prank of his daughter, who was apparently so absorbed that she noticed nothing; but when he heard the familiar notes of the song, his muscles began working: he stepped forward, his arms jauntily akimbo, and forgetting all he had to do, set to dancing. A loud shout of laughter from his friend Tsybulya startled both of them.

"Here is a pretty thing! The dad and his daughter getting up a wedding on their own account! Make haste and come along: the bridegroom has arrived!"

At the last words Paraska flushed a deeper crimson than the ribbon which bound her head, and her light-hearted parent remembered his errand.

"Well, daughter, let us make haste! Hivrya is so pleased that I have sold the mare," he went on, looking timorously about him, "that she has run off to buy herself aprons and all sorts of rags, so we must get it all over before she is back."

Paraska had no sooner stepped over the threshold than she felt herself caught in the arms of the lad in the white jacket, who with a crowd of people was waiting for her in the street.

"God bless you!" said Tcherevik, joining their hands. "May their lives together cleave as the wreaths of flowers they weave."¹

At this point a hubbub was heard in the crowd.

"I'd burst before I'd allow it!" screamed Tcherevik's helpmate, who was being shoved back by the laughing crowd.

"Don't excite yourself, wife!" Tcherevik said coolly, seeing that two sturdy gypsies held her hands, "what

¹ The proverbial form of greeting to a newly-wedded couple in Little Russia.

is done can't be undone: I don't like going back on a bargain!"

"No, no, that shall never be!" screamed Hivrya, but no one heeded her; several couples surrounded the happy pair and formed an impenetrable dancing wall around them.

A strange feeling, hard to put into words, would have overcome any one watching how the whole crowd was willy-nilly transformed into a scene of unity and harmony, at one stroke of the bow of the fiddler, who had long twisted moustaches and wore a homespun jacket. Men whose sullen faces seemed to have known no gleam of a smile for years were tapping with their feet and wriggling their shoulders; everything was heaving, everything was dancing. But an even stranger and more enigmatic feeling would have been stirred in the heart at the sight of old women, whose ancient faces breathed the indifference of the tomb, shoving their way between the young, laughing, living human beings. Caring for nothing, without the joy of childhood, without a gleam of fellow-feeling, nothing but drink, like an engineer with a lifeless machine, makes them perform actions that seem human; yet they slowly wag their drunken heads, dancing after the rejoicing crowd, not casting one glance at the young couple.

The sounds of laughter, song and uproar grew fainter and fainter. The strains of the fiddle were lost in vague and feeble notes, and died away in the wind. In the distance there was still the sound of dancing feet, something like the far-away murmur of the sea, and soon all was stillness and emptiness again.

Is it not thus that joy, lovely and inconstant guest, flies from us? In vain the last solitary note tries to express gaiety. In its own echo it hears melancholy and emptiness and listens to it, bewildered. Is it not thus that those who have been sportive friends in free and stormy youth, one by one stray, lost, about the world and leave their old comrade lonely and forlorn at last? Sad is the lot of one left behind! Heavy and sorrowful is his heart and naught can aid him!

1829.

SAINT JOHN'S EVE

(A True Story told by the Sacristan.)

I was a special peculiarity of Foma Grigoryevitch's that he had a mortal aversion for repeating the same story. It sometimes happened that one persuaded him to tell a story over again, but then he would be bound to add something fresh, or would tell it so differently that you hardly knew it for the same. It chanced that one of those people—it is hard for us, simple folk, to know what to call them, for scribes they are not, but they are like the dealers at our fairs: they beg, they grab, they filch all sorts of things and bring out a little book, no thicker than a child's reader, every month or every week—well, one of these gentry got this story out of Foma Grigoryevitch, though he quite forgot all about it. And then that young gentleman in the pea-green coat of whom I have told you already and whose story, I believe, you have read, arrives from Poltava, brings with him a little book and, opening it in the middle, shows it to us. Foma Grigoryevitch was just about to put his spectacles astride his nose, but recollecting that he had forgotten to mend them with thread and wax, handed it to me. As I know how to read after a fashion and do not wear spectacles, I set to reading it aloud. I had hardly turned over

SAINT JOHN'S EVE

two pages when Foma Grigoryevitch suddenly nudged my arm.

"Wait a minute: tell me first what it is you are reading?"

I must own I was a little taken aback by such a question.

"What I am reading, Foma Grigoryevitch? Your story, your own words."

"Who told you it was my story?"

"What better proof do you want—it is printed here, 'Told by the sacristan of So-and-so.'"

"Hang the fellow who printed that! He's lying, the cur! Is that how I told it? What is one to do when a man has a screw loose in his head? Listen, I'll tell it to you now."

We moved up to the table and he began:

My grandfather (the kingdom of Heaven be his! May he have nothing but rolls made of fine wheat and poppy-cakes with honey to eat in the other world!) was a great hand at telling stories. Sometimes when he talked one could sit listening all day without stirring. He was not like the gabblers nowadays who drive you to pick up your cap and go out as soon as they begin spinning their yarns in a voice which sounds as though they had had nothing to eat for three days. I remember as though it were to-day—the old lady, my mother, was living then—how on a long winter evening when frost crackled outside and sealed up the narrow window of our cottage, she would sit with her distaff pulling out a long thread with one hand, rocking the cradle with her foot and singing a song which I can hear now. Spluttering and trembling

as though it were afraid of something, the lamp lighted up the cottage. The distaff hummed while we children clustered together listening to Grandad, who was so old that he had hardly climbed down from the stove for five years past. But not even his marvellous accounts of the old days, of the raids of the Cossacks, of the Poles, of the gallant deeds of Podkova, of Poltor-Kozhuh and Sagaidatchny interested us so much as stories of strange things that had happened long ago; they always made our hair stand on end and set us shuddering. Sometimes we were so terrified by them that in the evening you can't think how queer everything looked. Sometimes you would step out of the cottage for something at night and fancy that some visitor from the other world had got into your bed. And, may I never live to tell this tale again, if I did not often take my coat rolled up by way of pillow for the devil huddling there. But the chief thing about my Grandad's stories was that he never in his life told a lie and everything he told us had really happened.

One of his wonderful stories I am going to tell you now. I know there are lots of smart fellows who scribble in law-courts and read even modern print, though if you put in their hands a simple prayer-book they could not make out a letter of it, and yet they are clever enough at grinning and mocking! Whatever you tell them, they turn it all into ridicule. Such unbelief is spreading all over the world! Why—may God and the Holy Virgin look ill upon me!—you will hardly believe me: I dropped a word about witches one day, and there was a mad fellow—didn't believe in witches! Here, thank God, I have lived all these

long years and have met unbelievers who would tell a lie at confession as easily as I'd take a pinch of snuff, but even they made the sign of the cross in terror of witches. May they dream of . . . but I won't say what I would like them to dream of. . . . Better not speak of them.

How many years ago! over a hundred, my Grandad told us, no one would have known our village: it was a hamlet, the poorest of hamlets! A dozen huts or so, without plaster, or proper roofs, stood up here and there in the middle of the fields. No fences, no real barns where cattle or carts could be housed. And it was only the rich lived as well as that—you should have seen the likes of us poor ones: we used to dig a hole in the ground, and that was our hut! You could only tell from the smoke that Christians were living there. You will ask why did they live like that? It was not that they were poor: for in those days almost every one was a Cossack and brought home plenty of good things from other lands; but more because it was no use to have a good hut. All sorts of folk were roaming about the country then: Crimeans, Poles, Lithuanians! And sometimes even fellow-countrymen came in gangs and robbed us. All sorts of things used to happen.

In this village there often appeared a man, or rather a devil in human form. Why he came and where he came from nobody knew. He drank and made merry and then vanished, as though he had sunk into the water, and they heard no news of him. Then all at once he seemed to drop from the sky and was prowling about the streets of the village which was hardly more than a hundred paces from Dikanka, though there is no trace of it now. . . . He would pick up with any stray

Cossacks, and then there was laughter and singing, the money would fly and vodka would flow like water. . . . Sometimes he'd set upon the girls, heap ribbons, earrings, necklaces on them, till they did not know what to do with them. To be sure, the girls did think twice before they took his presents: who knows, they might really come from the devil. My own grandfather's aunt, who used to keep a tavern on what is now the Oposhnyansky Road where Basavryuk (that was the name of this devil of a fellow) often went for a drink, said she wouldn't take a present from him for all the riches in the world. And yet how could they refuse? Everybody was terrified when he scowled with his shaggy eyebrows and gave a look from under them that might make the stoutest take to his heels; and if a girl did accept, the very next night a friend of his from the bog with horns on his head might pay her a visit and try to strangle her with the necklace round her neck, or bite her finger if she had a ring, or pull her hair if she had a ribbon in it. A plague take them then, his fine presents! And the worst of it was, there was no getting rid of them: if you threw them into the water, the devilish necklace or ring would float on the top and come back straight into your hands.

In the village there was a church, and I fancy, if I remember right, it was Saint Panteley's. The priest there in those days was Father Afanassy of blessed memory. Noticing that Basavryuk did not come to church even on Easter Sunday, he thought to reprimand him and threaten him with a church penance. But no such thing! It was he that caught it! "Look here, my good sir," Basavryuk bellowed in reply to him, "you mind your own business and don't meddle

with other people's, unless you want your billy-goat's gullet choked with hot frumenty!" What was to be done with the cursed fellow? Father Afanassy merely declared that he should reckon any one who associated with Basavryuk a Catholic, an enemy of the Church of Christ and of the human race.

In the same village a Cossack called Korzh had a workman who was always known as Petro the Kinless—perhaps because no one remembered his parents. It is true that the churchwarden used to say that they had died of the plague when he was a year old, but my grandfather's aunt would not hear of that and did her very utmost to provide him with relations, though poor Petro cared no more about them than we do about last year's snow. She used to say that his father was still in Zaporozhye, that he had been taken prisoner by the Turks and suffered goodness knows what tortures, and that in some marvellous way he had escaped, disguised as a eunuch. The black-browed girls and young women cared nothing about his relations. All they said was that if he put on a new tunic, a black astrakhan cap with a smart blue top to it, hung a Turkish sword at his side and carried a whip in one hand and a handsome pipe in the other, he would outshine all the lads of the place. But the pity was that poor Petro had only one grey jacket with more holes in it than gold pieces in a Jew's pocket. And that was not what mattered; what did matter was that old Korzh had a daughter, a beauty—such as I fancy you have never seen. My grandfather's aunt used to say—and women, you know, would rather kiss the devil, saving your presence, than call any girl a beauty—that the girl's plump cheeks were as fresh and bright as a poppy of the most delicate

shade of pink when it glows, washed by God's dew, unfolds its leaves and preens itself in the rising sun; that her brows, like black strings such as our girls buy nowadays to hang crosses or coins on from travelling Russian pedlars, were evenly arched and seemed to gaze into her clear eyes; that her little mouth at which the young men stared greedily looked as though it had been created to utter the notes of a nightingale; that her hair, black as a raven's wings and soft as young flax, fell in rich curls on her gold-embroidered jacket (in those days our girls did not do their hair in plaits and twine them with bright-coloured ribbons). Ah, may God never grant me to sing "Alleluia" again in the choir, if I could not kiss her on the spot now, in spite of the grey which is spreading all over the old stubble on my head, and of my old woman, always at hand when she is not wanted. Well, if a lad and a girl live near each other . . . you all know what is bound to happen. Before the sun had fully risen, the footprints of the little red boots could be seen on the spot where Pidorka had been talking to her Petro. But Korzh would never have had an inkling that anything was amiss if—clearly it was the devil's prompting—one day Petro had not been so unwary as to imprint, as they say, a hearty kiss on Pidorka's rosy lips in the outer room without taking a good look round; and the same devil—may he dream of the Holy Cross, the son of a cur!—prompted the old chap to open the door. Korzh stood petrified, clutching at the door, with his mouth wide open. The accursed kiss seemed to overwhelm him completely. It seemed to him louder than the thud against the wall of the pestle with which in our day the peasants used to make a bang for lack of musket and gunpowder.

Recovering himself, he took his grandfather's whip from the wall and was about to flick it on Petro's back, when all of a sudden Pidorka's six-year-old brother Ivas ran in and threw his arms round the old man's legs in terror, shouting "Father, father, don't beat Petro!"

There was no help for it: the father's heart was not made of stone: hanging the whip on the wall, he quietly led Petro out of the hut. "If you ever show yourself again in my hut, or even under the windows, then listen: you will lose your black moustaches, and your forelock, too—it is long enough to go twice round your ear—will take leave of your head, or my name is not Terenty Korzh!"

Saying this he dealt him a light blow on the back of the neck, and Petro, caught unawares, flew headlong. So that was what his kisses brought him!

Our cooing doves were overwhelmed with sadness; and then there was a rumour in the village that a new visitor was continually seen at Korzh's—a Pole, all in gold lace, with moustaches, a sabre, spurs and pockets jingling like the bell on the bag that our sexton Taras carries about the church with him every day. Well, we all know why people visit a father when he has a black-browed daughter. So one day Pidorka bathed in tears took her little brother Ivas in her arms: "Ivas my dear, Ivas my darling, run fast as an arrow from the bow, my golden little one, to Petro, tell him everything: I would love his brown eyes, I would kiss his fair face, but my fate says nay. More than one towel I have soaked with my bitter tears. I am sick and sad at heart. My own father is my foe: he is forcing me to marry the detested Pole. Tell him that they are

making ready the wedding, only there will be no music at our wedding, the deacons will chant instead of the pipe and the lute. I will not walk out to dance with my bridegroom: they will carry me. Dark, dark will be my dwelling, of maple wood, and instead of a chimney a cross will stand over it!"

Standing stock-still, as though turned to stone, Petro heard Pidorka's words lisped by the innocent child.

"And I, poor luckless fool, was thinking of going to the Crimea or Turkey to win gold in war, and, when I had money, to come to you, my beauty. But it is not to be! An evil eye has looked upon us! I, too, will have a wedding, my dear little fish; but there will be no clergy at that wedding—a black raven will croak over me instead of a priest; the open plain will be my dwelling, the grey storm-clouds will be my roof; an eagle will peck out my brown eyes; the rains will wash my Cossack bones and the whirlwind will dry them. But what am I saying? To whom, of whom am I complaining? It is God's will, seemingly. If I must perish, then perish!" and he walked straight away to the tavern.

My grandfather's aunt was rather surprised when she saw Petro at the tavern and at an hour when a good Christian is at matins, and she stared at him open-eyed as though half awake when he asked for a mug of vodka, almost half a pailful. But in vain the poor fellow thought to drown his sorrow. The vodka stung his tongue like a nettle and seemed to him bitterer than wormwood. He flung the mug upon the ground.

"Give over grieving, Cossack!" something boomed out in a bass voice above him.

He turned round: it was Basavryuk! Ugh, what a

figure he looked! Hair like bristles, eyes like a bullock's.

"I know what it is you lack: it's this!" and then with a fiendish laugh he jingled the leather pouch he carried at his belt.

Petro started.

"Aha! Look how it glitters!" yelled the other, pouring the gold pieces into his hand. "Aha! how it rings! And you know, only one thing is asked for a whole pile of such baubles."

"The devil!" cried Petro. "Very well, I am ready for anything!" They shook hands on it.

"Mind, Petro, you are just in time: to-morrow is St. John the Baptist's Day. This is the only night in the year in which the bracken blossoms. Don't miss your chance! I will wait for you at midnight in the Bear's Ravine."

I don't think the hens are as eager for the minute when the goodwife brings their corn as Petro was for evening to come. He was continually looking whether the shadow from the tree were longer, whether the setting sun were not flushing red, and as the hours went on he grew more impatient. Ah, how slowly they went! It seemed as though God's day had lost its end somewhere. At last the sun was gone. There was only a streak of red on one side of the sky. And that, too, was fading. It turned colder. The light grew dimmer and dimmer till it was quite dark. At last! With his heart almost leaping out of his breast, he set off on his way and carefully went down through the thick forest to a deep hollow which was known as the Bear's Ravine. Basavryuk was there already. It was so dark that you could not see your hand before your

face. Hand in hand, they made their way over a muddy bog, caught at by the thorns that grew over it and stumbling almost at every step. At last they reached a level place. Petro looked round—he had never chanced to come there before. Here Basavryuk stopped.

"You see there are three hillocks before you? There will be all sorts of flowers on them, but may the powers from yonder keep you from picking one of them. But as soon as the bracken blossoms, pick it and do not look round, whatever you may fancy is behind you."

Petro wanted to question him further . . . but behold, he was gone. He went up to the three hillocks: where were the flowers? He saw nothing. Rank weeds overshadowed everything and smothered all else with their dense growth. But there came a flash of summer lightning in the sky, and he saw before him a whole bed of flowers, all marvellous, all new to him; and there, too, were the simple plumes of bracken. Petro was puzzled and he stood in perplexity—with his arms akimbo.

"What is there marvellous in this? One sees that green stuff a dozen times a day—what is there strange in it? Didn't the devil mean to make a mock of me?"

All at once a little flower began to turn red and to move as though it were alive. It really was marvellous! It moved and grew bigger and bigger and turned red like a burning coal. A little star suddenly shone out, something snapped—and the flower opened before his eyes, shedding light on the others about it like a flame.

"Now is the time!" thought Petro, and stretched out his hand. He saw hundreds of shaggy hands were

stretched from behind him towards it, and something seemed to be flitting to and fro behind his back. Shutting his eyes, he pulled at the stalk and the flower was left in his hand. Everything was hushed. Basavryuk, looking blue like a corpse, appeared sitting on a stump. He did not stir a finger. His eyes were fastened on something which only he could see; his mouth was half open, and no answer came from it. Nothing stirred all round. Ugh, it was terrible! . . . But at last a whistle sounded, which turned Petro cold all over, and it seemed to him as though the grass were murmuring, and the flowers were talking among themselves with a voice as delicate and sweet as silver bells: the trees resounded with angry gusts. Basavryuk's face suddenly came to life, his eyes sparkled. "At last, you are back, old hag!" he growled through his teeth. "Look, Petro, a beauty will appear before you: do whatever she tells you, or you will be lost for ever!"

Then with a gnarled stick he parted a thornbush and a little hut—on hen's legs, as they say in fairy tales—stood before them. Basavryuk struck it with his fist and the wall tottered. A big black dog ran out to meet them, and changing into a cat, with a squeal flew at their eyes.

"Don't be angry, don't be angry, old devil!" said Basavryuk, spicing his words with an oath which would make a good man stop his ears. In a trice where the cat had stood was an old woman wrinkled like a baked apple and bent double, her nose and chin meeting like nutcrackers.

"A fine beauty!" thought Petro, and a shudder ran down his back.

The witch snatched the flower out of his hands, bent

over it and spent a long time muttering something and sprinkling it with water of some sort. Sparks flew out of her mouth, there were flecks of foam on her lips. "Throw it!" she said, giving him back the flower. Petro threw it and, marvellous to relate, the flower did not fall at once, but stayed for a long time like a ball of fire in the darkness, and floated in the air like a boat; at last it began slowly descending and fell so far away that it looked like a little star no bigger than a poppy-seed. "Here!" the old woman wheezed in a hollow voice, and Basavryuk, giving him a spade, added: "Dig here, Petro, here you will see more gold than you or Korzh ever dreamed of."

Petro, spitting into his hands, took the spade, thrust at it with his foot and threw out the earth, a second spadeful, a third, another. . . . Something hard! . . . The spade clanked against something and would go no further. Then his eyes could distinguish clearly a small iron-bound box. He tried to get hold of it, but the box seemed to sink deeper and deeper into the earth; and behind him he heard laughter more like the hissing of snakes.

"No, you will never see the gold till you have shed human blood!" said the witch, and brought him a child about six years old covered with a white sheet, signing to him to cut off its head. Petro was dumb-founded. A mere trifle! for no rhyme or reason to murder a human being, and an innocent child, too! Angrily he pulled the sheet off the child, and what did he see? Before him stood Ivas. The poor child crossed its arms and hung its head. . . . Like one possessed, Petro flew at the witch, knife in hand, and was just lifting his hand to strike . . .

"And what did you promise for the sake of the girl?" thundered Basavryuk, and his words went through Petro like a bullet. The witch stamped her foot; a blue flame shot out of the earth and shed light down into its centre, so that it all looked as though made of crystal; and everything under the surface could be seen clearly. Gold pieces, precious stones in chests and in cauldrons were piled up in heaps under the very spot on which they were standing. His eyes glowed . . . his brain reeled. . . . Frantic, he seized the knife and the innocent blood spurted into his eyes. . . . Devilish laughter broke out all round him. Hideous monsters galloped in herds before him. Clutching the headless corpse in her hands, the witch drank the blood like a wolf. . . . His head was in a whirl! With a desperate effort he set off running. Everything about him was lost in a red light. The trees all bathed in blood seemed to be burning and moaning. The red-hot sky quivered. . . . Gleams of fire like lightning flashed before his eyes. At his last gasp he ran into his hut and fell on the ground like a sheaf of corn. He sank into a deathlike sleep.

For two days and two nights he slept without waking. Waking on the third day, he stared for a long time into the corners of the hut. But he tried in vain to remember what had happened; his memory was like an old miser's pocket out of which you can't entice a penny. Stretching a little, he heard something clink at his feet. He looked: two sacks of gold. Only then he remembered as though it were a dream that he had been looking for a treasure, that he had been frightened alone in the forest. . . . But at what price, how he had obtained it—that he could not recall.

Korzh saw the sacks and—was softened. Petro was this and Petro was that, and he could not say enough for him. "And wasn't I always fond of him, and wasn't he like my own son to me?" And the old fox carried on so incredibly that Petro was moved to tears. Pidorka began telling him how Ivas had been stolen by some passing gypsies, but Petro could not even remember the child: that cursed devilry had so confounded him!

There was no reason for delay. They sent the Pole away with a flea in his ear and began preparing the wedding. They baked wedding cakes, they hemmed towels and kerchiefs, rolled out a barrel of vodka, set the young people down at the table, cut the wedding-loaf, played the lute, the pipe, the bandura and the cymbals—and the merry-making began. . . .

You can't compare weddings nowadays with what they used to be. My grandfather's aunt used to tell about them—it was a treat! How the girls in a smart headdress of yellow, blue and pink ribbons, with gold braid tied over it, in fine smocks embroidered with red silk on every seam and adorned with little silver flowers, in morocco boots with high iron heels, danced round the room as gracefully as peacocks, swishing like a whirlwind. How the married women in a boat-shaped headdress, the whole top of which was made of gold brocade with a little slit at the back showing a peep of the gold cap below, with two little horns of the very finest black astrakhan, one in front and one behind, in blue coats of the very best silk with red lappets, holding their arms with dignity akimbo, stepped out one by one and rhythmically danced the *gopak*! How the lads in high Cos-sack hats, in fine cloth jerkins girt with silver em-

broidered belts, with a pipe in their teeth danced attendance on them and cut all sorts of capers! Korzh himself looking at the young couple could not refrain from recalling his young days: with a bandura in his hand, smoking his pipe and singing, at the same time balancing a goblet on his head, the old man fell to dancing in a half-squatting position. What won't people think of when they are making merry? They would begin, for instance, putting on masks—my goodness, they looked like monsters! Ah, it was a very different thing from dressing up at weddings nowadays. What do they do now? Only rig themselves out like gypsies or soldiers. Why, in old days one would be a Jew and another a devil, first they would kiss each other and then pull each other's forelocks. . . . Upon my soul! one laughed till one held one's sides. They would put on Turkish and Tatar dresses, all glittering like fire. . . . And as soon as they began fooling and playing tricks . . . there were no bounds to what they would do! An amusing incident happened to my grandfather's aunt who was at that wedding herself: she was wearing a full Tatar dress and with a goblet in her hand she was treating the company. The devil prompted some one to splash vodka over her from behind; another one, it seems, was just as clever, at the same moment he struck a light and set fire to her. . . . The flame flared up: poor aunt, terrified, began flinging off all her clothes before everybody. . . . The din, the laughter, the hubbub that arose—it was like a fair. In fact, the old people never remembered such a merry wedding.

Pidorka and Petro began to live like lady and gentleman. They had plenty of everything, it was all spick

and span. . . . But good people shook their heads a little as they watched the way they went on. "No good comes from the devil," all said with one voice. "From whom had his wealth come, if not from the tempter of good Christians? Where could he have got such a pile of gold? Why had Basavryuk vanished on the very day that Petro had grown rich?"

You may say that people invent things! But really, before a month was out, no one would have known Petro. What had happened to him, God only knows. He would sit still without stirring and not say a word to any one; he was always brooding and seemed trying to remember something. When Pidorka did succeed in making him talk, he would seem to forget and keep up a conversation and even be merry, but if by chance his eye fell on the bags, "Stay, stay, I have forgotten," he would say, and again he would sink into thought and again try to remember something. Sometimes after he had been sitting still for a long time it seemed that in another moment he would recall it all . . . and then it would pass away again. He fancied he had been sitting in a tavern; they brought him vodka; the vodka burnt him; the vodka was nasty; some one came up, slapped him on the shoulder; he . . . but after that everything seemed shrouded in a fog. The sweat dropped down his face and he sat down again, feeling helpless.

What did not Pidorka do! She consulted wizards, poured wax into water and burnt a bit of hemp¹—

¹When any one has had a fright and they want to know what has caused it, melted tin or wax is thrown into water and it will take the shape of whatever has caused the patient's terror; and after that the terror passes off. Hemp is burnt

nothing was of any use. So the summer passed. Many of the Cossacks had finished their mowing and harvesting; many of the more reckless ones had gone off fighting. Flocks of ducks were still plentiful on our marshes, but there was not a nettle-wren to be seen. The steppes turned red. Stacks of corn, like Cossacks' caps, were dotted about the field here and there. Wag-gons laden with faggots and logs were to be met on the roads. The ground was firmer and in places it was frozen. Snow began falling and the twigs on the trees were decked in hoar-frost like hare-fur. Already one bright frosty day the red-breasted bullfinch was strutting about like a smart Polish gentleman, looking for seeds in the heaps of snow, and the children were whipping wooden stops on the ice with huge sticks while their fathers lay quietly on the stove, coming out from time to time with a lighted pipe between their teeth to swear roundly at the good orthodox frost, or to get a breath of air and thrash the corn stored in the outer room.

At last the snow began to melt and "the pike smashed the ice with its tail," but Petro was still the same, and as time went on he was gloomier still. He would sit in the middle of the hut, as though riveted to the spot, with the bags of gold at his feet. He shunned company, let his hair grow, began to look dreadful and thought only about one thing: he kept trying to remember something and was vexed and angry that he could

for sickness or stomach complaint. A piece of hemp is lighted, thrown into a mug which is turned wrong side upwards over a bowl of water stood on the patient's stomach. Then after repeating a spell a spoonful of the water is given to the patient to drink.

not remember it. Often he would get up from his seat wildly, wave his arms, fix his eyes on something as though he wanted to catch it; his lips would move as though trying to utter some long-forgotten word—and then would remain motionless. . . . He was overcome by fury; he would gnaw and bite his hands as though he were mad, and tear out his hair in handfuls in his vexation, until he would grow quiet again and seem to sink into forgetfulness; and then he would begin to remember again, and again there would be fury and torment. . . . It was, indeed, a heaven-sent infliction.

Pidorka's life was not worth living. At first she was afraid to remain alone in her hut, but afterwards she grew used to her trouble, poor thing. But no one would have known her for the Pidorka of earlier days. No colour, no smile; she was pining and wasting away, she was crying her bright eyes out. Once some one must have taken pity on her and advised her to go to the witch in the Bear's Ravine, who was reputed able to cure all the diseases in the world. She made up her mind to try this last resource; little by little, she persuaded the old woman to go home with her. It was after sunset, on St. John's Eve. Petro was lying on the bench lost in forgetfulness and did not notice the visitor come in. But little by little he began to sit up and look at her. All at once he trembled, as though he were on the scaffold; his hair stood on end . . . and he broke into a laugh that cut Pidorka to the heart with terror. "I remember, I remember!" he cried with a fearful joy and, snatching up an axe, flung it with all his might at the old woman. The axe made a cut two inches deep in the oak door. The old woman vanished and a child about seven in a white shirt, with its head

covered, was standing in the middle of the hut. . . . The veil flew off. "Ivas!" cried Pidorka and rushed up to him, but the phantom was covered from head to foot with blood and shed a red light all over the hut. . . . She ran into the outer room in terror, but, coming to herself, wanted to help her brother; in vain! the door had slammed behind her so that she could not open it. Neighbours ran up, they began knocking, broke open the door: not a living soul within! The whole hut was full of smoke, and only in the middle where Petro had stood was a heap of ashes from which smoke was still rising. They rushed to the bags: they were full of broken potsherds instead of gold pieces. The Cossacks stood as though rooted to the spot with their mouths open and their eyes starting out of their heads, not daring to move an eyelash. This miracle threw them into such a panic.

What happen afterwards I don't remember. Pidorka took a vow to go on a pilgrimage. She gathered together all the goods left her by her father, and a few days later she vanished from the village. No one could say where she had gone. Some old women were so obliging as to declare that she had followed Petro where he had gone; but a Cossack who came from Kiev said he had seen in the convent there a nun wasted to a skeleton, who never ceased praying, and in her by every token the villagers recognised Pidorka; he told them that no one had ever heard her say a word; that she had come on foot and brought a setting for the ikon of the Mother of God with such bright jewels in it that it dazzled every one who looked at it.

But let me tell you, this was not the end of it all. The very day that the devil carried off Petro, Basa-

vryuk turned up again; but every one ran away from him. They knew now the kind of bird he was: no one but Satan himself disguised in human form in order to unearth buried treasure; and since unclean hands cannot touch the treasure he entices young men to help him. The same year every one deserted their old huts and moved into a new village, but even there they had no peace from that cursed Basavryuk. My grandfather's aunt used to say that he was particularly angry with her for having given up her old tavern on the Oposhnyansky Road and did his utmost to pay her out. One day the elders of the village were gathered at her tavern and were conversing according to their rank, as the saying is, at the table, in the middle of which was stood a whole roast sheep, and it would be a lie to call it a small one. They chatted of one thing and another; of marvels and strange happenings. And all at once they fancied—and of course it would be nothing if it were one of them, but they all saw it at once—that the sheep raised its head, its sly black eyes gleamed and came to life; it suddenly grew a black bristly moustache and significantly twitched it at the company. They all recognised at once in the sheep's head the face of Basavryuk; my grandfather's aunt even thought that in another minute he would ask for vodka. . . . The worthy elders picked up their caps and hurried home. Another day, the churchwarden himself, who liked at times a quiet half-hour with the family goblet, had not drained it twice when he saw the goblet bow down to him. "The devil take you!" and he set to crossing himself. . . . And at the same time a strange thing happened to his better-half: she had only just mixed the dough in a huge tub when suddenly the tub jumped

away. "Stop, stop!" Not a bit of it! its arms akimbo, the tub went solemnly pirouetting about all over the hut. . . . You may laugh; but it was no laughing matter to our forefathers. And in spite of Father Afanassy's going all over the village with holy water and driving the devil out of every street with the sprinkler, my grandfather's aunt complained for a long time that as soon as evening came on some one knocked on the roof and scratched on the wall.

But there! In this place where our village is standing you would think everything was quiet nowadays; but you know it is not so long ago, within my father's memory—and indeed I remember it—that no good man would pass the ruined tavern which the unclean race repaired long afterwards at their own expense. Smoke came out in clouds from the grimy chimney and, rising so high that one's cap dropped off if one looked at it, scattered hot embers all over the steppe, and the devil—no need to mention him, son of a cur—used to sob so plaintively in his hole that the frightened rooks rose up in flocks from the forest near and scattered with wild cries over the sky.

A MAY NIGHT
OR
THE DROWNED MAIDEN

The devil only knows what to make of it! If Christian folk begin any task, they fret and fret themselves like dogs after a hare, and all to no purpose; but as soon as the devil comes into it—in a jiffy—lo and behold, the thing's done!

I
GANNA

A RINGING song flowed like a river down the streets of the village. It was the hour when, weary from the cares and labours of the day, the lads and girls gather together in a ring in the glow of the clear evening to pour out their gaiety in strains never far removed from melancholy. And the brooding evening dreamily embraced the dark-blue sky, transforming everything into vagueness and distance. It was already dusk, yet still the singing did not cease. Lyovko, a young Cossack, the son of the village Head, slipped away from the singers with a bandura in his hands. He was wearing an astrakhan cap. The Cossack walked down the street thrumming on the strings of his instrument and dancing to it. At last he stopped quietly before the door of a cottage surrounded with low-growing cherry trees. Whose cottage was it?

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A MAY NIGHT

Whose door was it? After a few moments of silence, he began playing and singing:

"The sun is low, the evening's nigh,
Come out to me, my little heart!"

"No, it seems my bright-eyed beauty is sound asleep," said the Cossack when he had finished the song, and he went nearer to the window. "Galya! Galya, are you asleep, or don't you want to come out to me? You are afraid, I suppose that some one will see us, or perhaps you don't want to put your fair little face out into the cold? Don't be afraid, there is no one about, and the evening is warm. And if any one should appear, I will cover you with my jacket, wrap my sash round you or hide you in my arms—and no one will see us. And if there is a breath of cold, I'll press you warmer to my heart, I'll warm you with my kisses, I'll put my cap over your little white feet. My heart, my little fish, my necklace! Look out for a minute. Put your little white hand at least out of the window. . . . No, you are not asleep, proud maiden!" he brought out more loudly, in the voice of one ashamed at having for a moment demeaned himself; "you are pleased to mock at me; farewell!"

At this point he turned away, thrust his cap rakishly to one side, and walked haughtily away from the window, softly thrumming the strings of the bandura. At that moment the wooden handle turned: the door was flung open with a creak, and a girl in her seventeenth spring looked about her timidly, shrouded in the dusk, and, without leaving hold of the handle, stepped over the threshold. Her bright eyes shone with welcome like stars in the semi-darkness; her red coral necklace

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gleamed, and even the modest blush that suffused her cheeks could not escape the lad's eagle eye.

"How impatient you are!" she said to him in a low voice. "You are angry already! Why did you choose this time? Crowds of people are strolling up and down the street . . . I keep trembling . . ."

"Oh, do not tremble, my lovely willow! Cling closer to me!" said the lad, putting his arms round her, and casting aside his bandura, which hung on a long strap round his neck, he sat down with her at the door of the cottage. "You know it's pain to me to pass an hour without seeing you."

"Do you know what I am thinking?" the girl broke in, pensively gazing at him. "Something seems whispering in my ear that henceforth we shall not meet so often. People here are not good: the girls all look so enviously, and the lads . . . I even notice that of late my mother has taken to watching me more strictly. I must own, it was pleasanter for me with strangers."

A look of sadness passed over her face at these last words.

"Only two months at home and already you are weary of it! Perhaps you are tired of me, too?"

"Oh, I am not tired of you," she replied, laughing. "I love you, my black-browed Cossack! I love you because you have brown eyes, and when you look at me with them, it seems as though there were laughter in my heart; and it is gay and happy; because you twitch your black moustache so charmingly, because you walk along the streets singing and playing the bandura, and it's sweet to listen to you."

"Oh, my Galya!" cried the lad, kissing her and pressing her warmly to his heart.

"Stop! Enough, Lyovko! Tell me first, have you told your father?"

"Told him what?" he said, as though waking up from sleep. "That I want to marry and that you will be my wife? Yes, I have told him." But the words "I have told him" had a despondent sound upon his lips.

"Well?"

"What's one to do with him? He pretended to be deaf, the old rogue, as he always does; he wouldn't hear anything, and then began scolding me for strolling about all over the place, and playing pranks in the streets with the boys. But don't grieve, my Galya! I give you the word of a Cossack that I will get round him."

"Well, you have only to say the word, Lyovko, and you will have everything your own way. I know that from myself, sometimes I wouldn't obey you, but you have only to say a word—and I can't help doing what you want. Look, look!" she went on, laying her head on his shoulder and turning her eyes upward to the warm Ukrainian sky that showed dark blue, unfathomable through the leafy branches of the cherry trees that stood in front of them. "Look, yonder; far away, the stars are twinkling, one, two, three, four, five. . . . It's the angels of God, opening the windows of their bright dwellings in the sky and looking out at us, isn't it? Yes, Lyovko! they are looking at our earth, aren't they? If only people had wings like birds, so they could fly thither, high up, high up. . . . Oh, it's dreadful! Not one oak here reaches to the sky. But they do say there is some tree in a distant land the top of which reaches right to heaven and God comes down by it to the earth on the night before Easter."

"No, Galya, God has a ladder reaching from heaven right down to earth. The holy archangels put it up before Easter Sunday, and as soon as God steps on the first rung of it, all the evil spirits fall headlong and sink in heaps down to hell. And that is how it is that at Christ's festival there isn't one evil spirit on earth."

"How softly the water murmurs, like a child lying in its cradle!" Ganna went on, pointing to the pond in its gloomy setting of a wood of maple trees and weeping willows, whose drooping boughs dipped into it. Like a feeble old man, it held the dark distant sky in its cold embrace, covering with its icy kisses the flashing stars, which gleamed dimly in the warm ocean of the night air as though they felt the approach of the brilliant sovereign of the night. An old wooden house lay slumbering with closed shutters on the hill by the copse; its roof was covered with moss and weeds; leafy apple trees grew in all directions under the windows; the wood, wrapping it in its shade, threw an uncanny gloom over it; a thicket of nut trees lay at its foot and sloped down to the pond.

"I remember as though it were a dream," said Ganna, not taking her eyes off him, "long, long ago when I was little and lived with mother, they used to tell some dreadful story about that house. Lyovko, you must know it, tell it me. . . ."

"Never mind about it, my beauty! The women and silly folk tell all sorts of stories. You will only upset yourself, you'll be frightened and won't sleep soundly."

"Tell me, tell me, dear black-browed lad!" she said, pressing her face against his cheek and putting her arm around him. "No, I see you don't love me; you have some other girl. I won't be frightened; I will sleep

sound at night. Now I shan't sleep if you don't tell me. I shall be worried and thinking. . . . Tell me, Lyovko . . . !"

"It seems folk are right when they say that there is a devil of curiosity in girls, egging them on. Well, listen then. Long ago, my little heart, there was a Cos-sack officer used to live in that house. He had a daughter, a fair maiden, white as snow, white as your little face. His wife had long been dead; he took it into his head to marry again. 'Will you care for me the same, father, when you take another wife?' 'Yes, I shall, my daughter, I shall press you to my heart more warmly than ever! I shall, my daughter. I shall give you ear-rings and necklaces brighter than ever!'

"The father brought his young wife to her new home. The new wife was fair of face. All red and white was the young wife; only she gave her stepdaughter such a dreadful look that the girl uttered a shriek when she saw her, and the harsh stepmother did not say a word to her all day. Night came on. The father went with his young wife to his sleeping chamber, and the fair maiden shut herself up in her little room. She felt sad at heart, she began to weep. She looked round, and a dreadful black cat was stealing up to her; there were sparks in her fur and her steely claws scratched on the floor. In terror she jumped on a bench, the cat followed her; she jumped on the oven-step, the cat jumped after her, and suddenly leapt on her neck and was stifling her. Tearing herself away with a shriek she flung it on the floor. Again the dreadful cat stole up. She was overcome with terror. Her father's sword was hanging on the wall. She snatched it up and brought

it down with a crash on the floor, one paw with its steely claws flew off and the cat with a squeal disappeared into a dark corner. All day the young wife did not come out of her room; two days afterwards she came out with her arm bandaged. The poor maiden guessed that her stepmother was a witch and that she had cut off her hand. On the fourth day the father bade his daughter fetch the water, sweep the house like a humble peasant-girl and not show herself in her father's apartments. It was a hard lot for the poor girl, but there was no help for it; she obeyed her father's will. On the fifth day the father turned his daughter, barefoot, out of the house and did not give her a bit of bread to take with her. Then only the maiden fell to sobbing, hiding her white face in her hands. 'You have sent your own daughter to perish, father! The witch has ruined your sinful soul! God forgive you; and it seems it is not His will that I should live in this fair world. . . . And yonder do you see . . .?' At this point Lyovko turned to Ganna, pointing towards the house, "Look this way, yonder, on the very highest part of the bank! From that bank the maiden threw herself into the water. And from that hour she was seen no more. . . ."

"And the witch?" Ganna asked in a frightened voice, fastening her tearful eyes on him.

"The witch? The old women make out that ever since then all the maidens drowned in the pond have come out on moonlight nights into that garden to warm themselves, and the officer's daughter is leader among them. One night she saw her stepmother beside the pond; she pounced upon her, and with a shriek dragged her into the water. But the witch saved herself even

then: she changed under water into one of the drowned girls, and so escaped the scourge of green reeds with which the maidens meant to beat her. Trust a woman! They say, too, that the maiden assembles all the drowned girls every night and looks into the face of each, trying to find out the witch, but hitherto has not found her. And if she comes across any living man she makes him guess which it is; or else she threatens to drown him in the water. So, my Galya, that's how old people tell the story! . . . The present master wants to set up a distillery there and has sent a distiller here to see to it. . . . But, I hear voices. It's our fellows coming back from singing. Good-night, Galya! Sleep well and don't think about these old women's tales."

Saying this, he embraced her warmly, kissed her and walked away.

"Good-night, Lyovko," said Ganna, gazing dreamily at the dark wood.

At that moment a huge fiery moon began majestically rising from the earth. Half of it was still below the horizon, yet all the world was already flooded with its solemn light. The pond was covered with gleaming ripples. The shadow of the trees began to stand out clearly against the dark green grass.

"Good-night, Ganna!" the words uttered behind her were accompanied by a kiss.

"You have come back," she said, looking round, but seeing a lad she did not know, she turned away.

"Good-night, Ganna!" she heard again, and again she felt a kiss on her cheek.

"Here the Evil One has brought another!" she said angrily.

"Good-night, dear Ganna!"

"That's the third one!"

"Good-night, good-night, good-night, Ganna," and kisses were showered upon her from all sides.

"Why, there is a regular gang of them!" cried Ganna, tearing herself away from the crowd of lads, who vied with each other in trying to embrace her. "I wonder they are not sick of this everlasting kissing! Upon my word, one won't be able to show oneself in the street soon!"

The door slammed upon these words and nothing more was heard but the iron bolt squeaking in its socket.

II

THE HEAD

Do you know the Ukrainian night? Oh, you do not know the Ukrainian night! Look at it: the moon looks out from the centre of the sky; the immense dome of heaven stretches further, more inconceivably immense than ever; it glows and breathes; the earth is all bathed in a silvery light; and the exquisite air is refreshing and warm and full of voluptuousness, and an ocean of fragrance is stirring. Divine night! Enchanting night! The woods stand motionless, mysterious, full of gloom, and cast huge shadow. Calm and still lie the ponds. The cold and darkness of their waters are gloomily walled in by the dark green gardens. The virginal thickets of wild cherry timidly stretch their roots into the cold of the water and from time to time murmur in their leaves, as though angry and indignant when the sweet rogue—the night wind—steals up sud-

denly and kisses them. All the country-side is sleeping. But overhead all is breathing; all is marvellous, triumphal. And the soul is full of the immensity and the marvel; and silvery visions rise up in harmonious multitudes from its depths. Divine night! Enchanting night! And suddenly it all springs into life: the woods, the ponds and the stones. The glorious clamour of the Ukrainian nightingale bursts upon the night and one fancies the moon itself is listening in mid-heaven. . . . The hamlet on the upland sleeps as though spell-bound. The groups of cottages gleam whiter, fairer than ever in the moonlight; their low walls stand out more dazzlingly in the darkness. The singing has ceased. All is still. God-fearing people are asleep. Only here and there is a light in the narrow windows. Here and there before the doorway of a cottage a belated family is still at supper.

"But that's not the way to dance the *gopak*. I feel that it won't come right somehow. What was that my crony was saying . . . ? Oh yes: hop, tra-la! hop, tra-la! hop, hop, hop!" So a middle-aged peasant, who had been drinking and was dancing down the street, talked to himself. "I swear, that's not the way to dance the *gopak*. Why should I tell a lie about it? I swear it's not right. Come: hop, tra-la! hop, tra-la! hop, hop, hop!"

"There's a man tipsy! And it's not as though it were a lad, but an old fool like that, enough to make the children laugh, dancing in the street at night!" cried an elderly woman who passed by, carrying an armful of straw. "Go to your cottage! You ought to have been asleep long ago!"

"I am going," said the peasant, stopping. "I am

going. I don't care about any Head. He thinks, the Old One flay his father, that because he is the Head, because he pours cold water over folks in the frost, he can turn up his nose at every one! Head indeed! I am my own Head. God strike me dead! Strike me dead, God! I am my own Head. That's how it is and nohow else," he went on, and going up to the first cottage he reached and standing before the window, he passed his fingers over the window pane and tried to find the door handle. "Wife, open! Look alive, I tell you open! It's time the Cossack was asleep!"

"Where are you going, Kalenik? You are at somebody else's cottage," some girls on their way home from the merry singing, shouted from behind him, laughing. "Shall we show you your cottage?"

"Show me the way, kind maidens fair!"

"Maidens fair! Do you hear," said one of them, "how polite Kalenik is? We must show him the way to his cottage for that . . . but no, you dance on in front."

"Dance . . . ? ah, you tricky girls!" Kalenik drawled, laughing and shaking his finger at them, and he lurched forward because his legs were not steady enough to stand still. "Come, give me a kiss. I'll kiss you all, every one of you . . . !" And with staggering steps he fell to running after them. The girls set up a shriek and huddled together; then, growing bolder, ran over to the other side of the street, seeing that Kalenik was not very rapid on his feet.

"Yonder is your cottage!" they shouted to him, pointing, as they walked away, to a cottage, much larger than his own, which belonged to the Head of the village. Kalenik obediently turned in that direction, beginning to abuse the Head again.

But who was this village Head who aroused such unfavourable opinions and criticisms? Oh, he was an important person in the village. While Kalenik is on his way we shall certainly have time to say something about him. All the villagers took off their caps when they saw him, and the girls, even the youngest, wished him good-day. Which of the lads would not have liked to be Head? He was free to help himself to every one's snuff, and the sturdy peasant would stand respectfully, cap in hand, all the time while the Head fumbled with his fat, coarse fingers in the peasant's birch-bark snuff-box. At the village council, although his power was limited to a few votes, he always took the upper hand and almost on his own authority sent whom he pleased to level and repair the roads or dig the ditches. He was austere, forbidding of aspect, and not fond of wasting words. Long very long ago when the great Tsaritsa Catherine, of blessed memory, was going to the Crimea, he had been chosen to act as a guide. For two whole days he had performed this duty, and had even been deemed worthy to sit on the box beside the Tsaritsa's coachman. It was from that time that he had taken to bowing his head with a dignified and meditative air, to stroking his long, drooping moustaches, and to shooting hawk-like glances from under his brows. And from that time, too, whatever subject was broached, the Head always cleverly turned the conversation to the way in which he had guided the Tsaritsa, and sat on the box of the Tsaritsa's carriage. He liked at times to pretend to be deaf, especially when he heard something that he did not want to hear. He could not endure foppishness: he always wore a long tunic of black homespun cloth, always girt with a coloured woollen sash, and no

one had ever seen him in any other costume, except on the occasion of the Tsaritsa's visit to the Crimea when he wore a dark blue Cossack tunic. But hardly any one in the village can remember that time; the tunic he still kept locked up in a chest. He was a widower, but he had living in the house with him his sister-in-law, who cooked the dinner and the supper, washed the benches, whitewashed the cottage, wove him shirts, and looked after the house. They did say in the village that she was not his sister-in-law at all, but we have seen already that there were many who bore no goodwill to the Head and were glad to circulate any scandal about him. Though, perhaps, what did give colour to the story was the fact that the sister-in-law was displeased if he went out into a field that was full of girls reaping, or visited a Cossack who had a young daughter. The Head had but one eye, but that eye was a shrewd villain and could see a pretty village girl a long way off. He does not, however, fix it upon a prepossessing face before he has taken a good look around to see whether his sister-in-law is watching him. But we have said almost all that we need about the Head, while tipsy Kalenik was on his way there still continuing to bestow on the Head the choicest epithets his slow and halting tongue could pitch upon.

III

AN UNEXPECTED RIVAL

A PLOT

"No, lads, no, I won't! What pranks you are up to! I wonder you are not sick of mischief. Goodness

knows, people call us scamps enough already. You had better go to bed!" So said Lyovko to his rollicking companions who were persuading him to join in some fresh pranks. "Farewell, lads! Good-night to you!" and with rapid steps he walked away from them down the street.

"Is my bright-eyed Ganna asleep?" he wondered, as he approached the cottage with the cherry trees known to us already. Subdued voices could be heard in the stillness. Lyovko stood still. He could see the whiteness of a shirt through the trees. . . . "What does it mean?" he wondered, and stealing up a little nearer, hid behind a tree. The face of the girl who stood before him gleamed in the moonlight. . . . It was Ganna! But who was the tall man standing with his back towards him? In vain he gazed at him; the shadow covered him from head to foot. Only a little light fell upon him in front, but the slightest step forward would have exposed Lyovko to the unpleasant risk of being discovered. Quietly leaning against the tree he resolved to remain where he was. The girl distinctly pronounced his name.

"Lyovko? Lyovko is a milksop," the tall man brought out huskily and in a low voice. "If I ever meet him here, I'll pull him out by his top-knot."

"I should like to know what scoundrel it is, boasting that he will pull me away by my topknot!" murmured Lyovko softly, and he craned his neck, trying not to miss one word. But the intruder went on speaking so softly that he could not hear what was said.

"I wonder you are not ashamed!" said Ganna, when he had finished speaking. "You are lying, you are

deceiving me; you don't love me; I shall never believe that you love me!"

"I know," the tall man went on, "Lyovko has talked a lot of nonsense to you and has turned your head." (At this point the boy fancied that the voice was not quite unknown to him, it seemed as though he had heard it before.) "I'll show Lyovko what I am made of!" the unknown went on in the same way. "He thinks I don't see all his wanton tricks. He shall find out, the young cur, what my fists are like!"

At those words Lyovko could not restrain his rage. Taking three steps towards him, he swung his fist to give him a clout on the ear which might have sent him flying, for all his apparent strength; but at that instant the moonlight fell on his face, and Lyovko was stupefied to see standing before him—his father. An unconscious jerk of the head and a faint whistle were the only expression of his amazement. A rustle was heard. Ganna hurriedly flew into the cottage, slamming the door after her.

"Good-night, Ganna!" one of the lads cried at that moment, stealing up and putting his arm round the Head, and skipped back with horror, meeting his stiff moustache.

"Good-night, my beauty!" cried another; but this one was sent flying by a violent push from the Head.

"Good-night, good-night Ganna!" called several lads, hanging on his neck.

"Be off, you cursed scamps!" cried the Head, pushing them off and kicking them. "Ganna indeed! Go and be hanged like your fathers, you brood of Satan! They come round one like flies after honey! I'll teach you . . . !"

"The Head, the Head, it's the Head," shouted the lads and scattered in all directions.

"Aha, father!" said Lyovko, recovering from his amazement and looking after the Head as he walked away swearing. "So these are the tricks you are up to! A nice thing! And I have been brooding and wondering what was the meaning of his always pretending to be deaf when one begins speaking about it. Wait a bit, old fellow, I'll teach you to hang about under young girls' windows. I'll teach you to lure away other men's sweethearts! Hey, lads! Come here, come here, this way!" he shouted, waving his hands to the lads who had gathered into a group again. "Come here! I advised you to go to bed, but now I have changed my mind and am ready to make merry with you all right."

"That's the way to talk!" said a stout, broad-shouldered lad who was reckoned the merriest and most mischievous in the village. "It always makes me sick when we can't manage to have a decent bit of fun and play some prank. I always feel as though I had missed something, as though I had lost my cap or my pipe; not like a Cossack, in fact."

"What do you say to our giving the Head a good stir up?"

"The Head?"

"Yes. What's he thinking about? He rules us as though he were a Hetman. He is not satisfied with treating us as though we were his serfs, but he must needs go after our girls, too. I do believe there is not a nice-looking girl in the whole village that he has not made up to."

"That's true, that's true!" cried all the lads with one voice.

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"What's wrong with us, lads? Aren't we the same sort as he is? Thank God, we are free Cossacks! Let us show him, lads, that we are free Cossacks!"

"We'll show him," shouted the lads. "And if we give it to the Head, we won't spare his clerk either!"

"We won't spare the clerk! And I have just made up a splendid song, it's the very thing for him. Come along, I will teach it you," Lyovko went on, striking the strings of his bandura. "But I say, dress up in anything that comes handy!"

"Go it, brave Cossacks!" said the sturdy scamp, striking his feet together and clapping his hands. "How glorious! What fun. When you go in for a frolic you feel as though you were celebrating bygone years. Your heart is light and free and your soul might be in paradise. Hey, lads! Hey, now for some fun . . . !"

And the crowd moved noisily down the street, and God-fearing old women, awakened from their sleep by the shouts, pulled up their windows and crossed themselves with drowsy hands, saying: "Well, the lads are enjoying themselves now!"

IV

THE LADS MAKE MERRY

Only one cottage at the end of the village was still lighted up. It was the Head's. He had finished his supper long ago, and would no doubt have been asleep by this time, but he had a visitor, the man who had been sent to set up a distillery by the landowner who had a small piece of land among the free Cossacks. The visitor, a short, fat little man with little eyes that were

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always laughing, and seeming to express the pleasure he took in smoking, sat in the place of honour under the ikons, continually spitting and catching with his finger the tobacco ash that kept dropping out of his short pipe. Clouds of smoke were spreading rapidly over him and enveloping him in a dark blue fog. It seemed as though a big chimney of some distillery, weary of sitting on its roof, had thought it would like a change, and was sitting decorously in the Head's cottage. Short thick moustaches stuck out below his nose; but they so indistinctly appeared and disappeared in the smoky atmosphere that they seemed like a mouse that the distiller, infringing the monopoly of the granary cat, had caught and held in his mouth. The Head, being in his own house, was sitting in his shirt and linen trousers. His eagle eye was beginning little by little to close and grow dim like the setting sun. One of the village constables who made up the Head's staff was smoking a pipe at the end of the table, and out of respect to his host still kept on his tunic.

"Are you thinking of setting up your distillery soon?" the Head asked, addressing the distiller and making the sign of the cross over his mouth as he yawned.

"With the Lord's help, maybe by the autumn we shall begin distilling. I'll bet that by Intercession our honoured Head will be drawing German breadrings with his feet on the road."

As he uttered these words, the distiller's eyes disappeared; where they had been were gleams of light stretching to his ears; his whole frame began to quiver with laughter, and for an instant his mirthful lips abandoned the pipe that poured forth clouds of smoke.

"Please God I may," said his host, twisting his face

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into a semblance of a smile. "Now, thank God, distilleries are doing better. But years ago, when I was guiding the Tsaritsa by the Pereyaslav Road, Bezborodko, now deceased . . ."

"Well, old friend, that was a time! In those days there were only two distilleries all the way from Kremenchug to Romny. But now . . . Have you heard what the damned Germans are going to do? They say that instead of burning wood in distilleries like all decent Christians, they are soon going to use some kind of devilish steam. . . ." As he said this the distiller looked thoughtfully at the table and at his hands lying on it. "How it is done with steam—upon my soul, I don't know!"

"What fools they are, those Germans, God forgive me!" said the Head. "I'd thrash them, the brood of Satan! Did any one ever hear the like of boiling anything by steam? According to that, you couldn't take a spoonful of soup without boiling your lips like a young sucking pig."

"And you, friend," the sister-in-law, who was sitting on the bed with her feet tucked under her, interposed, "are you going to stay with us all that time without your wife?"

"Why, what do I want with her? It would be different if she were something worth having."

"Isn't she good-looking?" asked the Head, fixing his eye upon him.

"Good-looking, indeed! Old as the devil. Her face all wrinkles like an empty purse." And the stubby frame of the distiller shook with laughter again.

At that moment something began fumbling at the door; the door opened—and a peasant crossed the

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threshold without taking off his cap, and stood in the middle of the cottage as though in hesitation, gaping and staring at the ceiling. This was our friend Kalenik.

"Here I am home at last," he said, sitting down on the bench near the door, and taking no notice of the company present. "I say, how the son of evil, Satan, did lengthen out the road! You went on and on, and no end to it! I feel as though some one had broken my legs. Woman, get the sheepskin to put down for me. I am not coming up beside you on the stove, that I am not, my legs ache! Fetch it, it's lying there under the ikons; only mind you don't upset the pot with the snuff. Or no, don't touch it, don't touch it! Maybe you are drunk to-day. . . . Let me get it myself."

Kalenik tried to get up, but an overmastering force riveted him to his seat.

"I like that," said the Head. "Walks into another man's cottage and gives orders as though he were at home! Throw him out, neck and crop. . . ."

"Let him stay and rest, friend!" said the distiller, holding him back by the arm. "He is a useful man; I wish there were more folk like him, and our distillery would do finely. . . ."

It was not good-nature, however, that dictated this remark. The distiller believed in omens of all sorts, and to turn a man out who had already sat down on the bench would have meant provoking misfortune.

"It seems as though age is creeping on me . . ." muttered Kalenik, lying down on the bench. "It would be all right if I were drunk, but I am not drunk. No, indeed, I am not drunk. Why tell a lie about it? I am ready to tell the Head himself so. What do I care for the Head. May he choke, the cur! I spit on him. I

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wish a waggon would run over him, the one-eyed devil! Why does he drench people in the frost?"

"Aha, the pig has made its way into the cottage, and is putting its feet on the table," said the Head, wrathfully rising from his seat; but at that moment a heavy stone, smashing the window to shivers, fell at their feet. He stopped short. "If I knew," he said, picking up the stone, "if I knew what gallows-bird flung in that stone I'd teach him to throw stones! What tricks!" he went on, looking with flashing eyes at the stone in his hand. "May he choke with this stone . . . !"

"Stay, stay, God preserve you, friend!" cried the distiller, turning pale. "God preserve you in this world and the next from blessing any one with such abuse!"

"Here's a champion! Confound him!"

"Don't think of it, friend! I suppose you don't know what happened to my late mother-in-law?"

"Your mother-in-law?"

"Yes, my mother-in-law. One evening, a little earlier it may be than it is now, they sat down to supper: my mother-in-law and father-in-law and their hired man and their hired girl and their five children. My mother-in-law shook some dumplings out of a big cauldron into a bowl to cool them. They were all hungry after their work and did not want to wait for the dumplings to get cool. Picking them up on long wooden skewers they began eating them. All at once a man appeared: where he came from no one can say, who he was, God only knows. He asks them to let him sit down to table. Well, there is no refusing a hungry man food. They gave him a skewer, too. Only the visitor stowed away the dumplings like a cow eating hay. While the others had eaten one each, and were

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prodding after more with their skewers, the bowl was as clean as a gentleman's floor. My mother-in-law put out some more; she thought the visitor had had enough and would take less. Nothing of the sort: he began gulping them down faster than ever and emptied the second bowl. "And may you choke with the dumplings!" thought my hungry mother-in-law, when all of a sudden the man choked and fell on the floor. They rushed up to him, but the spirit had fled. He was choked."

"And serve him right, the damned glutton!" said the Head.

"Quite so, but it didn't end with that: from that time forward my mother-in-law had no rest. As soon as night came on the dead man climbed up. He sat astride on the chimney, the cursed fellow, holding a dumpling in his teeth. In the daytime all was quiet and they didn't hear a sound of him, but as soon as it began to get dusk, look at the roof and there you would see him, sitting on the chimney, the son of a cur."

"And a dumpling in his teeth?"

"And a dumpling in his teeth."

"How marvellous, friend! I had heard something of the sort about your mother-in-law . . ."

The speaker stopped short. Under the window they heard an uproar and the thud of dancing feet. First there was the soft thrumming of the bandura strings, then a voice joined in with it. The strings twanged more loudly, several voices joined in and the singing rose up like a whirlwind.

"Laddies, have you heard the news now!

Heads it seems are none too sound!

Our one-eyed Head's a barrel-head

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Whose staves have come unbound!
Come, cooper, knock upon it hard,
And bind with hoops of steel!
Come hammer, cooper, on the head
And hit with right good will!
Our Head is grey and has one eye;
Old as sin, and what a blockhead!
Full of whims and wanton fancies;
Makes up to the girls . . . the blockhead!
You must try to ape the young ones!
When you should be in your coffin,
Flung in by the scruff and whiskers!
By the top-knot you're so proud of!"

"A fine song, friend!" said the distiller, inclining his head a little on one side and turning towards his host, who was struck dumb with amazement at such insolence. "Fine! it's only a pity that they refer to the Head in rather disrespectful terms. . . ."

And again he put his hands on the table with a sort of gleeful delight in his eyes, preparing himself to hear more, for from below came peals of laughter and shouts of "Again! again!" However, a penetrating eye could have seen at once that it was not astonishment that kept the Head from moving. An old experienced cat will sometimes in the same way let an inexperienced mouse run round his tail while he is rapidly making a plan to cut off its way back to its hole. The Head's solitary eye was still fixed on the window, and already his hand, after making a sign to the constable, was on the wooden door-handle, when all at once a shout rose from the street. . . . The distiller, among whose characteristics curiosity was one, hurriedly filled his pipe and ran out into the street; but the rogues had already scattered in all directions.

"No, you won't get away from me!" cried the Head,

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dragging by the arm a man in a black sheepskin, put on inside out. The distiller, seizing the opportunity, ran to have a look at this disturber of the peace, but he staggered back in alarm at seeing a long beard and a horribly painted face. "No, you won't escape me!" shouted the Head, still dragging straight into the outer room his prisoner, who offered no resistance but followed him quietly, as though going into his own cottage. "Karpó, open the store-room!" said the Head to the constable; "we'll put him in the dark store-room. And then we will wake the clerk, get the constables together, catch all these brawlers, and to-day we will pass judgment on them all."

The constable clanked a small padlock in the outer room and opened the store-room. At that instant his captive, taking advantage of the dark store-room, wrenched himself out of his hands with a violent effort.

"Where are you off to?" cried the Head, clutching him more tightly than ever by the collar.

"Let go, it's me!" cried a thin shrill voice.

"That won't help you, that won't help you, my lad. You may squeal like a devil, as well as a woman, you won't take me in," and he shoved him into the dark store-room, so that the poor prisoner uttered a moan as he fell on the floor, while, accompanied by the constable and followed by the distiller, puffing like a steamer, he went off to the clerk's cottage.

They walked along all three with their eyes on the ground, lost in meditation, when, at a turning into a dark lane, all of them at once uttered a shriek, from a violent bang on their foreheads, and a similar cry of pain echoed in response. The Head, screwing up his eye, saw with surprise the clerk and two constables.

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"I was coming to see you, worthy clerk!"

"And I was coming to your worship, honoured Head."

"Strange things have been happening, worthy clerk."

"Very strange things, honoured Head!"

"Why, what?"

"The lads have gone crazy! They are going on disgracefully in the street, whole gangs of them. They describe your honour in language . . . I should be ashamed to repeat it. A drunken soldier couldn't bring his dirty tongue to utter such words." (All this the lanky clerk, in striped linen breeches and a waistcoat the colour of wine dregs, accompanied by craning his neck forward and dragging it back again to its former position.) "I had just dropped into a doze, when the cursed scamps roused me from my bed with their shameful songs and knocking! I meant to take stern measures with them, but while I was putting on my breeches and waistcoat, they all ran away in different directions. The ringleader did not get away, though. He is singing now in the cottage where we keep prisoners. I was all eagerness to find out what bird it was we'd caught, but his face is all black like the devils who forge nails for sinners."

"And how is he dressed, worthy clerk?"

"In a black sheepskin put on inside out, honoured Head."

"Aren't you lying, clerk? What if that rascal is sitting now in my store-room?"

"No, honoured Head! You yourself, not in anger be it said, are a little in error!"

"Give me a light! we will have a look at him!"

The light was brought, the door unlocked, and the

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Head uttered a groan of amazement when he saw facing him—his sister-in-law!

"Tell me, please," with these words she pounced upon him, "have you lost what little wits you ever had? Was there a grain of sense in your thick head, you one-eyed fool, when you pushed me into the dark store-room? It was lucky I did not hit my head against the iron hook. Didn't I scream out to you that it was me? The cursed bear seizes me in his iron paws and shoves me in! May the devils treat you the same in the other world . . . !"

The last words were uttered in the street where she had gone for some purpose of her own.

"Yes, I see that it's you," said the Head, recovering himself. "What do you say, worthy clerk? Isn't this scamp a cunning rogue?"

"He is a cunning rogue, honoured Head."

"Isn't it high time that we gave all these rascals a good lesson and set them to work?"

"It's high time, high time, honoured Head!"

"They have taken it into their heads, the fools . . . What the devil? I thought I heard my sister-in-law scream in the street . . . They have taken it into their heads, the fools, that they are as good as I am. They think I am one of them, a simple Cossack! . . ." The little cough that followed this, and the way he looked round from under his brows indicated that the Head was about to speak of something important. "In the year eighteen . . . I never can bring out these confounded dates—Ledatchy, who was then Commissar, was given orders to pick out from the Cossacks the most intelligent of them all. Oh!" (that "Oh!" he pro-

nounced with his finger in the air) "the most intelligent! to act, as guide to the Tsaritsa. At that time I . . ."

"What need to tell us! we all know that, honoured Head! We all know how you won the royal favour. Own now that I was right. You took a sin upon your soul when you said that you had caught that rogue in the black sheepskin."

"Well, as for that devil in the black sheepskin, we'll put him in fetters and punish him severely as an example to others! Let him know what authority means! By whom is the Head appointed if not by the Tsar? Then we'll get hold of the other fellows: I have not forgotten how the confounded scamps drove a herd of pigs into my kitchen garden that ate up all my cabbages and cucumbers; I have not forgotten how the sons of Satan refused to thrash my corn; I have not forgotten . . . But plague take them, I must find out who that rascal is, wearing a sheepskin inside out."

"He's a wily bird, it seems!" said the distiller, whose cheeks during the whole of this conversation were continually being charged with smoke, like a siege cannon, and his lips, abandoning the short pipe, were ejecting a perfect fountain of smoke. "It wouldn't be amiss, anyway, to keep the fellow for working in the distillery; or better still, hang him from the top of an oak tree like a church candlestick."

Such a witticism did not seem quite foolish to the distiller, and he at once decided, without waiting for the approval of the others, to reward himself with a husky laugh.

At that moment they drew near a small cottage that had almost sunk into the earth. Our friends' curiosity grew keener: they all crowded round the door. The

clerk took out a key and jingled it about the lock; but it was the key of his chest. The impatience became acute. Thrusting his hand into his pocket he began fumbling for it, and swearing because he could not find it.

"Here!" he said at last, bending down and taking it from the depths of the roomy pocket with which his full striped trousers were provided.

At that word the hearts of all our heroes seemed melted into one, and that huger heart beat so violently that the sound of its uneven throb was not lost even in the creaking of the lock. The door was opened, and . . . The Head turned white as a sheet, the distiller was aware of a cold chill, and the hair of his head seemed rising up towards heaven; horror was depicted on the countenance of the clerk: the constables were rooted to the spot, and were incapable of closing their mouths, which had fallen open simultaneously: before them stood the sister-in-law.

No less amazed than they, she, however, pulled herself together, and made a movement as though to approach them.

"Stop!" cried the Head in an unnatural voice, and slammed the door in her face. "Oh Lord, it is Satan!" he went on. "A light! quick, a light! I won't spare the cottage, though it is Crown property. Set fire to it, set fire to it, that the devil's bones may not be left on earth!"

The sister-in-law screamed terribly, hearing through the door this sinister decision.

"What are you about, friends!" said the distiller. "Your hair, thank God, is almost white, but you have not gained sense yet: a witch won't burn with ordinary

fire! Only a light from a pipe can burn a changeling of the devil's! Wait a bit, I will manage it in a minute!"

Saying this, he scattered some burning ash out of his pipe on to a wisp of straw, and began blowing on it. The poor sister-in-law was meanwhile overwhelmed with despair; she began loudly imploring and beseeching them.

"Stay, friends! Why take a sin upon us in vain? Perhaps it is not Satan!" said the clerk. "If it, whatever it may be that is sitting there, consents to make the sign of the cross, that's a sure token that it is not a devil."

The proposition was approved.

"Get thee behind me, Satan!" said the clerk, putting his lips to the keyhole. "If you don't stir from your place we will open the door."

The door was opened.

"Cross yourself!" said the Head, looking behind him as though seeking a safe place in case of retreat.

The sister-in-law crossed herself.

"The devil! it really is my sister-in-law! What evil spirit dragged you to this hole?"

And the sister-in-law, sobbing, told them that the lads had seized her in the street and, in spite of her resistance, had bundled her in at the wide window of the cottage and had nailed up the shutter. The clerk glanced: the staples of the broad shutter had been pulled out, and it was only fixed on by a board at the top.

"All right, you one-eyed Satan!" she screamed, stepping up to the Head, who staggered back and still scanned her with his solitary eye. "I know your de-

sign—you wanted, you would have been glad to do for me, to be more free to go after the girls, to have no one to see the gray-headed old grandad playing the fool. You think I don't know what you were saying this evening to Ganna? Oh, I know all about it. It's hard to deceive me, let alone for a numskull like you. I am long-suffering, but when I do lose patience, you'll have something to put up with."

Saying this, she shook her fist at him and walked away quickly, leaving him completely stupefied.

"Well, Satan has certainly had a hand in it this time," he thought, scratching his head vigorously.

"We've caught him," cried the constables, coming in at that instant.

"Caught whom?" asked the Head.

"The devil with his sheepskin inside out."

"Give him here!" shouted the Head, seizing the prisoner by the arm. "You are mad! this is the drunkard, Kalenik."

"What a queer thing! We had him in our hands, honoured Head!" answered the constables. "The confounded lads came round us in the lane, began dancing and capering, tugging at us, putting out their tongues and snatching him out of our hands. . . . Damnation take it! . . . And how we hit on this crow instead of him the devil only knows!"

"By my authority and that of all the members of the parish council the command is given," said the Head, "to catch that rascal this minute, and in the same way all whom you find in the street, and to bring them to me to be questioned! . . ."

"Upon my word, honoured Head . . . !" cried some of them, bowing down to his feet. "You should have

seen what ugly faces; strike us dead, we have been born and been christened but have never seen such horrid faces. Mischief may come of it, honoured Head. They may give a simple man such a fright that there isn't a woman in the place who would undertake to cure him of his panic."

"Panic, indeed! Why? are you refusing to obey? I expect you are hand in glove with them? You are mutinying! What's this . . . ! What's the meaning of it . . . ? You are getting up a rebellion . . . ! You . . . you . . . I'll report it to the Commissar. This minute, do you hear, this minute! Run, fly like a bird! I'll show you . . . You'll show me . . ."

They all ran off in different directions.

V

THE DROWNED MAIDEN

The instigator of all this turmoil, undisturbed by anything and untroubled by the search-parties that were being sent in all directions, walked slowly towards the old house and the pond. I think that I need hardly say that it was Lyovko. His black sheepskin was unbuttoned; he held his cap in his hand; the sweat ran down his face in streams. The maple wood stood majestic and gloomily black, only sprinkled with delicate silver on the side facing the moon. A refreshing coolness from the motionless pond breathed on the tired wanderer and lured him to rest for a while on the bank. All was still. The only sound was the trilling of the nightingale in the deepest recesses of the wood. An overpowering drowsiness soon made his eyes close; his tired limbs were almost sinking into sleep and forget-

fulness; his head drooped. . . . "No, if I go on like this I shall fall asleep here!" he said, getting on to his feet and rubbing his eyes.

He looked round and the night seemed even more brilliant. A strange enchanting radiance was mingled with the light of the moon. He had never seen anything like it before. A silvery mist had fallen over everything around him. The fragrance of the apple blossom and the night-scented flowers flooded the whole earth. He gazed with amazement at the motionless water of the pond: the old manor-house, upside down in the water, was distinct and looked serenely dignified. Instead of gloomy shutters there were bright glass windows and doors. There was a glitter of gilt through the clean panes. And then it seemed as though a window opened. Holding his breath, not stirring, nor taking his eyes from the pond, he seemed to pass into its depths and saw—first, a white elbow appeared in the window, then a charming little head with sparkling eyes, softly shining through her dark brown locks, peeped out and rested on the elbow, and he saw her slightly nod her head. She beckoned, she smiled. . . . His heart suddenly began throbbing. . . . The water quivered and the window was closed again. He moved slowly away from the pond and looked at the house: the gloomy shutters were open; the window panes gleamed in the moonlight. "See how little one can trust what people say," he thought to himself. "It's a new house; the paint is as fresh as though it had been painted to-day. Some one is living there." And in silence he went up closer to it, but all was still in the house. The glorious singing of the nightingales rang out loud and melodious, and when it seemed to die away

in languor and voluptuousness, there was heard the rustle and churr of the grasshoppers, or the deep note of some marsh bird, striking his slippery beak on the broad mirror of the water. There was a sense of sweet stillness and space and freedom in Lyovko's heart. Tuning his bandura, he began playing it and singing:

"Oh, thou moon, my darling moon!
And thou, glowing clear sunrise!
Oh, shine brightly o'er the cottage,
Where my lovely maiden lies!"

The window slowly opened and the head, the reflection of which he had seen in the pond, looked out listening intently to the singing. Her long eyelashes half hid her eyes. She was white all over, like a sheet, like the moonlight; but how exquisite, how lovely! She laughed . . . ! Lyovko started.

"Sing me a song, young Cossack!" she said softly, bending her head on one side and veiling her eyes completely with her thick eyelashes.

"What song shall I sing you, my fair lady?"

Tears rolled slowly down her pale face. "Youth," she said, and there was something inexpressibly touching in her speech, "Youth, find me my stepmother! I will grudge you nothing. I will reward you. I will reward you richly, sumptuously. I have sleeves embroidered with silk, corals, necklaces. I will give you a girdle adorned with pearls. I have gold. Youth, find me my stepmother! She is a terrible witch, I had no peace in life because of her. She tormented me, she made me work like a simple peasant-girl. Look at my face. By her foul spells she drew the roses from my cheeks. Look at my white neck: they will not wash

off, they will not wash off, they never will be washed away, those dark blue marks left by her claws of steel! Look at my white feet, far have they trodden—not on carpets only—but on the hot sand, on the damp earth, on sharp thorns have they trodden! And at my eyes, look at my eyes; they have grown dim with weeping! Find her, youth, find me my stepmother . . . !"

Her voice, which had risen, sank into silence. Tears streamed down her pale face. The young man's heart was oppressed by a painful feeling of pity and sadness.

"I am ready to do anything for you, my fair lady!" he said with heartfelt emotion, "but how can I, where can I find her?"

"Look, look!" she said quickly, "she is here, she is on the bank, playing games among my maidens, and warming herself in the moonlight. She is sly and cunning, she has taken the form of a drowned maiden; but I know, I feel that she is here. I am oppressed, I am stifled by her. I cannot swim lightly and easily like a fish, because of her. I drown and sink to the bottom like a key. Find her, youth!"

Lyovko looked towards the bank: in the delicate silvery mist there were maidens glimmering, light as shadows, in smocks white as a meadow dotted with lilies-of-the-valley; gold necklaces, strings of beads, coins glittered on their necks; but they were pale; their bodies looked as though moulded out of transparent clouds, and it seemed as though the moonlight shone through them. The maidens singing and playing drew nearer to him. He heard their voices.

"Let us play raven and chickens," they murmured, like river reeds kissed by the ethereal lips of the wind at the quiet hour of twilight.

OVENS NEAR DIKANKA

and one of the girls stepped out of the rutinised her. Her face, her dress, like the rest. The only thing he noticed not like to play her part. The chain, it raced rapidly away from the rapacious enemy.

"I want to be the raven," said the maiden.
"I am sorry to snatch the chickens

... the witch!" thought Lyovko.

"The raven?" The maidens made ready to

One in the centre of the group

Looking intently at her face. Boldly pursued the chain, and darted from capture her victim. At that point that her body was not so translucent evening black could be seen in the there was a shrieking; the raven had of the chain, seized her, and Lyovko out her claws, and that there was a y in her face.

and suddenly, pointing his finger at

the window laughed, and the girls.
had played raven.

...the one who had played havoc
...I know you have
...harsh father

"I canna but your harsh father
Now he will not hinder it:

...hand was outstretched, her face seemed in

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a marvellous way full of light and radiance. . . . With his heart beating painfully, overwhelmed with agitation, he clutched the note, and . . . woke up.

VI

THE AWAKENING

"Can I have been asleep?" Lyovko wondered, getting up from the little hillock. "It was as living as though it were real . . . ! Strange, strange!" he said, looking about him. The moon standing right over his head showed that it was midnight; everywhere all was still, and a chill air rose from the pond; above him stood the old house with its shutters closed. The moss and high grass showed that it had been abandoned long ago. Then he opened his hand, which had been tightly closed all the time he had been asleep, and cried out with astonishment, feeling a note in it. "Oh, if I could only read!" he thought, turning it over, and looking at it on all sides. At that moment he heard a noise behind him.

"Don't be afraid, seize him straight away! Why are you so scared? there are a dozen of us. I bet you anything it is a man and not a devil . . . !" So the village Head shouted to his companions and Lyovko felt himself seized by several hands, some of which were shaking with fear.

"Throw off your dreadful mask, friend! Leave off making fools of folk," said the Head, seizing him by the collar; but he was astounded when he turned his eye upon him. "Lyovko! son!" he cried, stepping back in amazement and dropping his hands. "It's you, son of a cur! Oh, you devil's brood! I was wondering

EVENINGS NEAR DIKANKA

"Who will be raven?"

They cast lots, and one of the girls stepped out of the group. Lyovko scrutinised her. Her face, her dress, all was exactly like the rest. The only thing he noticed was that she did not like to play her part. The group drew out in a chain, it raced rapidly away from the pursuit of the rapacious enemy.

"No, I don't want to be the raven," said the maiden, weary and exhausted, "I am sorry to snatch the chickens from their poor mother."

"You are not the witch!" thought Lyovko.

"Who will be raven?" The maidens made ready to cast lots again.

"I will be raven!" One in the centre of the group offered herself.

Lyovko began looking intently at her face. Boldly and swiftly she pursued the chain, and darted from side to side to capture her victim. At that point Lyovko noticed that her body was not so translucent as the others, something black could be seen in the inside. Suddenly there was a shrieking; the raven had pounced on one of the chain, seized her, and Lyovko fancied that she put out her claws, and that there was a spiteful gleam of joy in her face.

"The witch!" he said suddenly, pointing his finger at her and turning towards the house.

The maiden at the window laughed, and the girls, shouting, led away the one who had played raven.

"How am I to reward you, youth? I know you have no need of gold: you love Ganna, but your harsh father will not let you marry her. Now he will not hinder it: take this note and give it him. . . ."

Her white hand was outstretched, her face seemed in

A MAY NIGHT

a marvellous way full of light and radiance. . . . With his heart beating painfully, overwhelmed with agitation, he clutched the note, and . . . woke up.

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who could be the rascal, what devil turned inside out was playing these tricks. And it seems it is all your doing—you half-cooked pudding sticking in your father's throat! You are pleased to get up rows in the street, compose songs . . . ! Ah, ah, Lyovko! What's the meaning of it? It seems your back is itching for the rod! Seize him!"

"Stay, father! I was told to give you this letter," said Lyovko.

"This is not the time for letters, my dear! Bind him."

"Stay, honoured Head," said the clerk, opening the note, "it is the Commissar's handwriting."

"The Commissar's?"

"The Commissar's," the constable repeated mechanically.

"The Commissar's? Strange! It is more incomprehensible than ever!" Lyovko thought to himself.

"Read it, read it!" said the Head. "What does the Commissar write?"

"We shall hear what the Commissar writes," said the distiller, holding his pipe in his teeth and striking a light.

The clerk cleared his throat and began reading:

"Instruction to the Head, Yevtuh Makogonenko. The news has reached us that you, old fool, instead of collecting past arrears and setting the village in order, have gone silly and been behaving disgracefully. . . ."

"Upon my soul," the Head interrupted, "I don't hear a word!"

The clerk began over again: "Instruction to the Head, Yevtuh Makogonenko. The news has reached us that you, old foo . . ."

"Stop, stop! you needn't go on," cried the Head. "Though I can't hear it, I know that what matters isn't that. Read what comes later!"

"And therefore I command you to marry your son Lyovko Makogonenko to Ganna Petrychenkov, a Cos-sack maiden of your village, and also to mend the bridges on the high road, and do not without my authorisation give the villagers' horses to the law-court gentry, even if they have come straight from the government office. If on my coming I find these my commands not carried out, I shall hold you alone responsible. Commissar, retired Lieutenant, Kozma Derkatch-Drishpanovsky."

"Well, upon my word!" said the Head, gaping with wonder. "Do you hear that, do you hear? The Head is responsible for it all, and so you must obey me unconditionally, or you will catch it! . . . As for you," he went on, turning to Lyovko, "since it's the Commissar's orders, though I can't understand how it came to his ears, I'll marry you: only first you shall have a taste of my whip! You know the one that hangs on the wall near the ikons. I'll repair it to-morrow. . . . Where did you get that note . . . ?"

In spite of Lyovko's astonishment at this unexpected turn of events, he had the wit to get ready in his mind an answer and to conceal the true explanation of the way he had received the letter.

"I was in the town yesterday evening," he said, "and met the Commissar getting out of his chaise. Learning that I came from this village, he gave me the letter and told me to give you the message, father, that on his way back he will come and dine with us."

"He told you that?"

"The Commissar," said the Head with an air of dignity, turning to his companions, "the Commissar is coming to get down to the likes of us, that is to me, to dinner."

"How?" Here he held up his finger and lifted up his head as though he were listening to something. "The Commissar is coming to hear, the Commissar is coming to hear you!"

"What do you think, worthy clerk, and your dignified friend?"

"That's an honour not to be sniffed at!

"I have never seen my recollection," chimed in the clerk, "and I have never yet entertained the Commis-

"Heads and Heads," said the Head with a chuckle. His mouth twisted and something in his throat broke into a husky laugh more like the rumbling of a train than a human voice came from his lips. "What do you think, clerk? Oughtn't we for this disturbance to give orders that every cottage should have at least a chicken and, well, some linen and a few more things. . . . Eh?"

"When is the wedding to be, father?" asked

"I'll teach you to talk about wed-
ding! Oh well, for the sake of our distinguished
tomorrow the priest shall marry you.
You! Let the Commissar see what punctual
of duty means! Well, lads, now it is bed-
time. What has happened to-day
of the time when I . . ." At these words
from under his brows with his habit-
of importance and dignity.

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"Now the Head's going to tell us how he guided the Tsaritsa," said Lyovko, and with rapid steps he made his way joyfully towards the familiar cottage, surrounded by low-growing cherry trees. "God give you the kingdom of Heaven, kind and lovely lady!" he thought to himself. "May you in the other world be smiling for ever among the holy angels. I shall tell no one of the marvel that has happened this night; to you only Galya, I will tell it. Only you will believe me and together we will pray for the peace of the soul of the luckless drowned maiden!"

Here he drew near the cottage: the window was open, the moonlight shone through it upon Ganna as she lay asleep with her head upon her arm, a soft glow on her cheeks: her lips moved faintly murmuring his name. "Sleep, my beauty, dream of all that is fairest in the world, though that will not be better than our awakening."

Making the sign of the cross over her he closed the window and gently moved away.

And in a few minutes all the village was asleep; only the moon floated as radiant and marvellous in the infinite spaces of the glorious Ukrainian sky. There was the same triumphal splendour on high, and the night, the divine night glowed with the same solemn grandeur. The earth was as lovely in the marvellous silvery light, but no one was enchanted by it; all were sunk in sleep. Only from time to time the silence was broken for a moment by the bark of a dog, and for a long while drunken Kalenik was still staggering along the slumbering street looking for his cottage.

THE LOST LETTER

(A Tale Told by the Sacristan.)

SO you want me to tell you another story about Grandad? Certainly, why not amuse you with some more . . . ? Ah, the old days, the old days! What joy, what gladness it brings to the heart when one hears of what was done in the world so long, long ago, that the year and the month are forgotten! And when some kinsman of one's own is mixed up in it, a grandfather or great-grandfather—then I'm done for: may I be taken with a cough at the Anthem to the Holy Martyr Varvara if I don't fancy that I'm doing it all myself, as though I had crept into my great-grandfather's soul, or my great-grandfather's soul were playing tricks in me. . . . But there, our girls and young women are the worst for plaguing me; if I only let them catch a glimpse of me, it's "Foma Grigoryevitch! Foma Grigoryevitch! come now, some terrible tale! come now, come now . . . !" "Tara-ta-ta, ta-ta-ta and they keep on and on. . . . I don't grudge telling them a story, of course, but you should see what happens to them when they are in bed. Why, I know every one of them is trembling under the quilt as though she were in a fever and would be glad to creep under her sheepskin, head and all. If a rat scratches against a pot, or she herself touches the oven-fork with her foot—

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THE LOST LETTER

it's "Lord preserve us!" and her heart's in her heels But it's no matter next day; she'll pester me over again to tell her a terrible story, and that's all about it. Well, what am I to tell you? Nothing comes into my mind at the minute . . . oh yes, I'll tell you how the witches played "Fools" with my grandfather. But I must beg you first, good friends, not to interrupt me or it will make a hash of it not fit to put to one's lips. My Grandad, I must tell you, was a leading Cossack in his day. He knew t-o to, and where to put the mark of abbreviation. On a saint's day, he would boom out the Acts of the Apostles, in a voice that would make a priest's son of to-day feel small. Well, you know without my telling you that in those days if you collected all who could read and write from the whole of Baturin you'd not need your cap to hold them in, there wouldn't be a handful altogether. So it's no wonder that every one who met my Grandad made him a bow, and a low one too.

One day our noble Hetman took it into his head to send a writing to the Tsaritsa about something. The secretary of the regiment in those days—there, I can't remember his name, the devil take him. . . . Viskryak, no, that's not it, Motuzotchka, that's not it, Goloputsek—no, not Goloputsek . . . all I know is that it was a queer name that began in an odd way—he sent for my Grandad and told him that the Hetman himself had named him as messenger to the Tsaritsa. My Grandad never liked to waste time getting ready: he sewed the writing up in his cap, led out his horse, kissed his wife and his two sucking-pigs, as he used to call them, of whom one was own father of me here, and Grandad made the dust fly that day as though fifteen lads had

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been playing a rowdy game in the middle of the street. The cock had not crowed for the fourth time next morning before Grandad had already reached Konotop. There used to be a fair there in those days: there were such crowds moving up and down the streets that it made one giddy to watch them. But as it was early the people were all stretched out on the ground asleep. Beside a cow would be lying a rakish lad with a nose as red as a bullfinch; a little further a pedlar-woman with flints, packets of blue, small shot and breadrings was snoring where she sat; a gypsy lay under a cart, a dealer on a wagon of fish; while a Great Russian with a big beard, carrying belts and sleeves for sale, sprawled with his legs stuck out in the middle of the road. . . . In fact, there was a rabble of all sorts, as there always is at fairs. My Grandad stopped to have a good look round. Meanwhile, little by little, there began to be a stir in the booths: the Jewesses made a clatter with the bottles; smoke rolled up in rings here and there, and the smell of hot doughnuts floated all over the encampment. It came into my Grandad's mind that he had no steel and tinder, nor tobacco with him; so he began sauntering about the fair. He had not gone twenty paces when he met a Zaporozhets.¹ A gay spark, and you could see it at once from his face! Breeches red as fire, a full-skirted blue coat and bright-flowered girdle, a sabre at his side and a pipe with a fine brass chain right down to his heels—a regular Zaporozhets Cossack, that's all you can say! Ah, they were folk! One would stand up, stretch himself, stroke his gallant

¹ A Cossack belonging to the military community settled at Zaporozhye (*i.e.* Beyond the Falls) on the Dnieper. The community is fully described in the second volume of Gogol's *Tales*.—(Translator's Note.)

moustaches, clink with his iron heels—and off he would go! And how he would go! His legs would whirl round like a distaff in a woman's hands: his fingers would pluck at all the strings of the bandura like a whirlwind, and then pressing it to his side he would set off dancing, burst into song—his whole soul rejoicing . . . ! Yes, the good old days are over; you don't see such Cossacks nowadays! No. So they met. One word leads to another, it doesn't take long to make friends. They fell to chatting and chatting, so that Grandad quite forgot about his journey. They had a drinking bout, as at a wedding before Lent. Only at last I suppose they got tired of smashing the pots and flinging money to the crowd, and, indeed, one can't stay for ever at a fair! So the new friends agreed not to part, but to travel on together. It was getting on for evening when they rode out into the open country. The sun had set; here and there streaks of red glowed in the sky where it had been; the country was gay with different coloured fields like the checked petticoats our black-browed peasant wives wear on holidays.

Our Zaporozhets talked away like mad. Grandad and another jaunty fellow who had joined them began to think that there was a devil in him. Where did it all come from? Tales and stories of such marvels that sometimes Grandad held his sides and almost split his stomach with laughing. But the further they went the darker it grew and with it the gay talk grew more disconnected. At last our story-teller was altogether silent and started at the slightest rustle.

"Aha, neighbour!" they said to him, "you have set to nodding in earnest: you are wishing now that you were at home and on the stove!"

"It's no use to have secrets from you," he said, suddenly turning round and fixing his eyes upon them. "Do you know that I sold my soul to the devil long ago?"

"As though that were something unheard of! Who hasn't had dealings with the devil in his day? That's why you must drain the cup of pleasure to the dregs, as the saying is."

"Ah, lads! I would, but this night the fatal hour has come! Hey, brothers!" he said, clasping their hands, "do not give me up! Watch over me one night! Never will I forget your friendship!"

Why not help a man in such trouble? Grandad vowed straight off he'd sooner have the forelock cut off his own head than let the devil sniff with his dog-nose at a Christian soul.

Our Cossacks would perhaps have ridden on further, if the whole sky had not clouded over as though with black homespun and it had not turned as dark as under a sheepskin. But there was a light twinkling in the distance and the horses, feeling that a stall was near, quickened their pace, pricking up their ears and staring into the darkness. It seemed as though the light flew to meet them, and the Cossacks saw before them a tavern, lurching over on one side like a peasant woman on her way home from a merry christening party. In those days taverns were not what they are now. There was nowhere for a good man to turn round or dance a jig—indeed, he had nowhere to lie down, even if the drink had got into his head and his legs began drawing rings all over the floor. The yard was all blocked up with dealers' waggons; under the sheds, in the mangers, in the barns men were snoring like tom-cats, one curled

up and another sprawling. Only the tavern-keeper before his little pot-lamp was making cuts in a stick to mark the number of quarts and pints the dealers had drained.

Grandad after ordering a third of a pailful for the three of them went off to the barn. They lay down side by side. But before he had time to turn round he saw that his friends were already sleeping like the dead. Waking the third Cossack, the one who had joined them, Grandad reminded him of the promise given to their comrade. The man sat up, rubbed his eyes and fell asleep again. There was nothing for it, he had to watch alone. To drive away sleep in some way, he examined all the waggons, looked at the horses, lighted his pipe, came back and sat down again beside his comrades. All was still, it seemed as though not a fly were moving. Then he fancied something grey poked out its horns from a waggon close by. . . . Then his eyes began to close, so that he was obliged to rub them every minute with his fist and to keep them open with the rest of the vodka. But soon, when they were a little clearer, everything had vanished. At last a little later something queer showed itself again under the waggon. . . . Grandad opened his eyes as wide as he could, but the cursed sleepiness made everything misty before them; his hands felt numb, his head rolled back and he fell into such a sound sleep that he lay as though he were dead. Grandad slept for hours, and he only sprang up on his feet when the sun was baking his shaven head. After stretching twice and scratching his back, he noticed that there were no longer so many waggons standing there as in the evening. The dealers, it seemed, had trailed off before dawn. He looked for

his companions—the Cossack was still asleep, but the Zaporozhets was gone. No one could tell him anything when he asked; only his top-coat was still lying in the same place. Grandad was frightened and didn't know what to think. He went to look for the horses—no sign of his or the Zaporozhets! What could that mean? Supposing the Evil One had taken the Zaporozhets, who had taken the horses? Thinking it over, Grandad concluded that probably the devil had come on foot, and as it's a good journey to hell he had carried off his horse. He was terribly upset at not having kept his Cossack word.

"Well," he thought, "there is nothing to be done, I will go on foot. Maybe I shall come across some horse-dealer on his way from the fair. I shall manage somehow to buy a horse." But when he reached for his cap, his cap was not there either. Grandad wrung his hands when he remembered that the day before he had changed caps for a time with the Zaporozhets. Who else could have carried it off if not the devil himself! A nice mess with the Hetman's favour! A nice job he'd made of taking the writing for the Tsaritsa! At this point my Grandad fell to bestowing such names on the devil as I fancy must have set him sneezing more than once in hell. But scolding is not much use, and however often my Grandad scratched his head, he could not think of any plan. What was he to do? He turned to take counsel from others: he got together all the good folk who were in the tavern at the time, dealers and simple wayfarers, told them how it all happened and what a misfortune had befallen him. A long time the dealers pondered. Leaning their chins on their whips, they shook their heads and said that they had

never heard of such a marvel in Christendom as a devil carrying off a Hetman's letter. Others added that when the devil or a Great Russian stole anything, you might whistle for it. Only the tavern-keeper sat silent in the corner. Grandad went up to him, too. When a man says nothing, you may be sure he thinks the more. But the tavern-keeper was sparing of his words, and if Grandad had not felt in his pocket for five silver coins, he might have gone on standing before him to no purpose.

"I will tell you how to find the writing," said the tavern-keeper, leading him aside. His words lifted a weight from Grandad's heart. "I see from your eyes that you are a Cossack and not a woman. Mind now! Near the tavern you will find a turning on the right into the forest. As soon as it begins to grow dark you must be ready to start. There are gypsies living in the forest and they come out of their dens to forge iron on nights on which none but witches go abroad on their oven-rakes. What their real trade is you had best not inquire. There will be much knocking in the forest, only do not you go where you hear the knocking; there'll be a little path facing you near a burnt tree, go by that little path, go on and on. . . . The thorns may scratch you, the thick nut-bushes may block the path, but you still go on; and when you come to a little stream, only then you may stop. There you will see whom you need. But forget not to take in your pockets that for which pockets are made. . . . You understand, both devils and men prize that." Saying this the tavern-keeper went off to his corner and would not say another word.

My Grandad was by no means one of the faint-

hearted brigade; if he met a wolf, he would take him by the tail straight away; if he used his fist among the Cossacks, they would fall to the ground like pears. But a shudder ran down him when he stepped into the forest on such a dark night. Not one little star in the sky. Dark and dim as a wine-cellar; there was no sound except far, far overhead a cold wind sporting in the tree-tops, and the trees like the heads of drunken Cossacks wagged recklessly while their leaves whispered a tipsy song. And there was such a cold blast that Grandad thought of his sheepskin, and all at once it was as though a hundred hammers began tapping in the forest with a noise that set his ears ringing. And the whole forest was lit up for a moment as though by summer lightning. At once Grandad caught sight of a little path winding between the bushes. And here was the burnt tree and here were the thorn bushes! So everything was as he had been told; no, the tavern-keeper had not deceived him. It was not altogether pleasant tearing his way through the prickly bushes; he had never in his life known the damned thorns and twigs scratch so badly. He was almost crying out at every step. Little by little he came out into an open place, and as far as he could see the trees seemed wider apart, and as he went on he came upon bigger trees than he had ever seen on the further side of Poland. And behold, among the trees gleamed a little stream, dark like tempered steel. For a long time Grandad stopped on the bank, looking in all directions. On the other bank a light was twinkling; it seemed every minute on the point of going out, and then was reflected again in the stream, trembling like a Pole in the hands of Cossacks. And here was the little bridge!

"Well, maybe none but the devil's chariot crosses by it." Grandad stepped out boldly, however, and before another man would have had time to get out his horn and take a pinch of snuff he was on the other side. Only now he discerned that there were people sitting round a fire, and such charming pig-faces that at any other time God knows what he would not have given to escape their acquaintance. But now there was no help for it, he had to make friends with them. So Grandad swung off a low bow, saying: "God help you, good people!"

Not one nodded his head; they all sat in silence and kept dropping something into the fire. Seeing one place empty Grandad without more ado sat down. The charming pig-faces said nothing, Grandad said nothing either. For a long time they sat in silence. Grandad was already beginning to be bored; he fumbled in his pocket, pulled out his pipe, looked round—not one of them glanced at him.

"Well, your worships, will you be so kind; as a matter of fact, in a manner of speaking . . ." (Grandad had knocked about the world a good bit and knew how to turn a phrase, and maybe even if he had been before the Tsar he would not have been at a loss.)

"In a manner of speaking, not to forget myself nor to slight you—a pipe I have, but that with which to light it I lack." To this speech, too, there was not a word. Only one of the pig-faces thrust a hot brand straight in Grandad's face, so that if he had not turned aside a little, he might have parted with one eye for ever. At last, seeing that time was being wasted, he made up his mind to tell his story whether the unclean race would listen or not. They pricked up their ears

and stretched out their paws. Grandad guessed what that meant; he pulled out all the money he had with him and flung it to them as though to dogs. As soon as he had flung the money, everything was in a turmoil before him, the earth shook and all at once—he never knew how to explain this part—he found himself almost in hell itself.

"Merciful heavens!" groaned my Grandad when he had taken a good look round. What marvels were here! One ugly face after another, as the saying is. The witches were as many as the snowflakes that fall sometimes at Christmas. They were all dressed up and painted like fine ladies at a fair. And all the lot of them were dancing some sort of devil's jig as though they were drunk. What a dust they raised, God help us! Any Christian would have shuddered to see how high the devils skipped. In spite of his terror, my Grandad fell a-laughing when he saw the devils, with their dogs' faces on their little German legs, wag their tails, twist and turn about the witches, like our lads about the pretty girls, while the musicians beat on their cheeks with their fists as though they were tambourines and whistled with their noses as though they were horns. As soon as they saw Grandad, they pressed round him in a crowd. Pig-faces, dog-faces, goat-faces, bustard-faces and horse-faces—all craned forward, and here they were actually trying to kiss him. Grandad could not help spitting, he was so disgusted! At last they caught hold of him and made him sit down at a table, as long, maybe, as the road from Konotop to Baturin.

"Well, this is not altogether so bad!" thought Grandad, seeing on the table pork, sausages, onion minced

with cabbage and many other dainties. "The hellish rabble doesn't keep the fasts, it seems."

My Grandad, I may as well tell you, was by no means averse to good fare on occasion. He ate with good appetite, the dear man, and so without wasting words he pulled towards him a bowl of sliced bacon fat and a smoked ham, took up a fork not much smaller than those with which a peasant pitches hay, picked out the most solid piece, laid it on a piece of bread—and lo and behold!—put it in another mouth just close beside his very ear, and, indeed, there was the sound of another fellow's jaws chewing it and clacking with his teeth, so that all the table could hear. Grandad didn't mind; he took up another piece, and this time it seemed as though he had caught it with his lips, but again it did not go down his gullet. A third time he tried—again he missed it. Grandad flew into a rage; he forgot his fright and in whose claws he was, and ran up to the witches: "Do you mean to laugh at me, you brood of Herod? If you don't this very minute give me back my Cossack cap—may I be a Catholic if I don't twist your pig-snouts to the wrong side of your heads!"

He had finished the last word when the monsters grinned and set up such a roar of laughter that it sent a chill to my Grandad's heart.

"Good!" shrieked one of the witches, whom my Grandad took to be the leader among them because she was almost the greatest beauty of the lot, "we will give you back your cap, but not until you win it back from us in three games of 'Fools'!"

What was he to do? For a Cossack to sit down and play "Fools" with a lot of women! Grandad kept refusing and refusing, but in the end sat down. They

brought the cards, a greasy pack such as we only see used by priests' wives to tell the girls their fortunes and what their husbands will be like.

"Listen!" barked the witch again: "if you win one game, the cap is yours; if you are left 'Fool' in every one of the three games, it's no use your fuming, you'll never see your cap nor maybe the world again!"

"Deal, deal, you old witch! what will be, will be."

Well, the cards were dealt. Grandad picked up his—he couldn't bear to look at them, they were such rubbish; as though to mock him, not a single trump. Of the other suits the highest was a ten and he hadn't even a pair; while the witch kept giving him five at once. It was his fate to be left "Fool"! As soon as Grandad was left "Fool," the monsters began neighing, barking, and grunting on all sides: "Fool, fool, fool!"

"Shout till you split, you devils," cried Grandad, putting his fingers to his ears.

"Well," he thought, "the witch didn't play fair, now I am going to deal myself." He dealt; he turned up the trump and looked at his cards; they were first-rate, he had trumps. And at first things could not have gone better; till the witch put down five cards with kings among them.

Grandad had nothing in his hand but trumps! Quick as thought he beat all the kings with trumps!

"Ha-ha! but that's not like a Cossack! What are you covering them with, neighbour?"

"What with? With trumps!"

"Maybe to your thinking they are trumps, but to our thinking they are not!"

Lo and behold! the cards were really of another suit!

What devilry was this? A second time he was "Fool" and the devils set off splitting their throats again: "Fool! fool!" so that the table rocked and the cards danced upon it.

Grandad flew into a passion; he dealt for the last time. Again he had a good hand. The witch put down five again; Grandad covered them and took from the pack a handful of trumps.

"Trump!" he shouted, flinging a card on the table so that it spun round like a basket; without saying a word she covered it with the eight of another suit.

"What are you beating my trump with, old devil?"

The witch lifted her card and under it was the six of another suit not trumps.

"What devilish trickery!" said Grandad, and in his vexation he struck the table with his fist as hard as he could. Luckily the witch had a poor hand; this time as luck would have it Grandad had pairs. He began drawing cards out of the pack, but it was of no use; such rubbish came that Grandad let his hands fall. There was not one good card in the pack. So he just played anything—a six. The witch had to take it, she could not cover it. "So there! what do you say to that? Ay, ay! there is something wrong, I'll be bound!" Then on the sly under the table Grandad made the sign of the cross over the cards, and behold—he had in his hand the ace, king, and knave of trumps, and the card he had just played was not a six, but the queen!

"Well, I've been the fool! King of trumps! Well, have you taken it? Ay, you brood of cats! Would you like the ace too? The ace! the knave . . .!"

A tumult arose in hell; the witch went into convulsions and all of a sudden the cap flew flop into Grandad's face.

"No, no, that's not enough!" shouted Grandad, plucking up his courage and putting on his cap. "If my gallant horse is not standing before me at once, may a thunder-bolt strike me dead in this foul place, if I do not make the sign of the holy cross over all of you!" And he was just raising his hand to do it when the horse's bones rattled before him.

"Here is your horse!"

The poor man burst out crying like a silly child as he looked at them. He grieved for his old comrade!

"Give me some sort of a horse," he said, "to get out of your den!" A devil cracked a whip—a horse like fire rose up under him and Grandad flew upwards like a bird.

Terror came over him, however, when the horse, heeding neither shout nor rein, galloped over ditches and bogs. The places he went through were such that it made him shudder at the mere telling of it. He looked down and was more terrified than ever: an abyss, a fearful precipice! But that was nought to the satanic beast; he leapt straight over it. Grandad tried to hold on; he could not. Over tree-stumps, over hill-ocks he flew headlong into a ditch, and fell so hard on the ground at the bottom that it seemed he had breathed his last. Anyway, he could remember nothing of what happened to him then; and when he came to himself a little and looked about him it was broad daylight; he caught glimpses of familiar places and found himself lying on the roof of his own hut.

Grandad crossed himself as he climbed down. What

devils' tricks! Damn it all! What marvellous things befall a man! He looked at his hands, they were all bathed in blood; he looked into a butt of water—and his face was the same. Washing himself thoroughly that he might not scare the children, he went quietly into the hut, and what did he see! The children staggered back towards him and pointed in alarm, saying: "Look! look! mother's jumping like mad!" And, indeed, his wife was sitting asleep before her wool-comb, holding her distaff in her hands and in her sleep was bouncing up and down on the bench. Grandad, taking her gently by the hand, woke her. "Good morning, wife! are you quite well?" For a long while she gazed at him with staring eyes, but at last recognised Grandad and told him that she had dreamed that the stove was riding round the hut shovelling out with a spade the pots and tubs . . . and devil knows what else.

"Well," said Grandad, "you have had it asleep, I have had it awake, I see I must have our hut blessed; but I cannot linger now."

Saying this Grandad rested a little, then got out his horse and did not stop by day or by night till he arrived and gave the writing to the Tsaritsa herself. There Grandad beheld such wonderful things that for long after he used to tell the tale: how they brought him to the palace, and it so high that if you were to set ten huts one on top of another then they maybe would not be high enough; how he glanced into one room—nothing, into another—nothing, into a third still nothing, into a fourth even, nothing, but in the fifth there she was sitting in her golden crown, in a new grey gown and red boots, eating golden dumplings; how she had bade them fill a whole cap with five-rouble notes for

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him; how . . . I can't remember it all! As for all his bobbery with the devils, Grandad forgot even to think about it, and, if it happened that some one reminded him of it, Grandad would say nothing, as though the matter did not concern him, and we had the greatest pains to persuade him to tell us how it had all happened. And seemingly to punish him for not rushing out at once after that to have the hut blessed, every year just at that same time a strange thing happened to his wife—she would dance and nothing would stop her. Whatever they did, her legs would go their own way and something seemed nudging her to dance.

PART TWO

PREFACE

HERE is a second part for you, and I had better say the last one! I did not want, I did not at all want to bring it out. One ought not to outstay one's welcome. I must tell you they are already beginning to laugh at me in the village. "The old fellow has gone silly," they say, "he is amusing himself with children's toys in his old age!" And, indeed, it is high time to rest. I expect you imagine, dear readers, that I am only pretending to be old. Pretend, indeed, when I have no teeth left in my mouth! Now if anything soft comes my way I manage to chew it, but I can't tackle anything hard. So here is another book for you! Only don't scold me! It is not nice to scold at parting, especially when God only knows whether one will soon meet again. In this book you will find stories told by people you do not know at all, except, perhaps, Foma Grigoryevitch. That gentleman in the pea-green coat who talked in such fine language that many of the wits even from Great Russia could not understand him, has not been here for a long time. He never looked in upon us since he quarrelled with us all. I did not tell you about it, did I? It was a regular comedy. Last year, some time in the summer, I believe it was on my Saint's Day, I had visitors to see me. . . . (I must tell you, dear readers, that my neighbours, God give them good health, do not forget the old man.) It is fifty years

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since I began keeping my name-day; but just how old I am neither I nor my old woman could say. It must be somewhere about seventy. The priest at Dikanka, Father Harlampy, knew when I was born, but I am sorry to say he has been dead these fifty years. So I had visitors to see me: Zahar Kirilovitch Tchuho-pupenko, Stepan Ivanovitch Kurotchka, Taras Ivanovitch Smachnenky, the assessor Harlampy Kirilovitch Hlosta; there was another one . . . I forget his name. . . . Osip . . . Osip. . . . Upon my soul, every one in Mirgorod knows him! Whenever he begins speaking he snaps his fingers and put his arms akimbo. . . . Well, bless the man! I shall think of it presently. The gentleman from Poltava whom you know already came too. Foma Grigoryevitch I do not count, he is one of ourselves. Everybody talked (I must tell you that our conversation is never about trifles; I always like seemly conversation, so as to combine pleasure and profit, as the saying is)--we discussed how to pickle apples. My old woman began saying that first you had to wash the apples thoroughly, then put them to soak in kvass and then . . . "All that is no use whatever!" the gentleman from Poltava interrupted, thrusting his hand into his pea-green coat and pacing about the room majestically, "not the slightest use! First you must sprinkle them with tansy and then . . ." Well, I ask you, dear readers, did you ever hear of apples being sprinkled with tansy? It is true, people do use black-currant leaves, swine-herb, trefoil; but to put in tansy. . . . I have never heard of such a thing! And I fancy no one knows more about these things than my old woman. But there you are! I quietly drew him aside, as a good neighbour: "Come now, Makar

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Nazarovitch, don't make people laugh! You are a man of some consequence; you have dined at the same table with the governor, as you told us yourself. Well, if you were to say anything like this there, you would set them all laughing at you!" And what do you imagine he said to that? Nothing! He spat on the floor, picked up his cap and went out. He might have said good-bye to somebody, he might have given us a nod; all we heard was his chaise with a bell on it drive up to the gate; he got into it and drove off. And a good thing too! We don't want guests like that. I tell you what, dear readers, there is nothing in the world worse than these high-class people. Because his uncle was a commissar once, he turns up his nose at every one. As though there were no rank in the world higher than a commissar! Thank God, there are people greater than commissars. No, I don't like these high-class people. Now Foma Grigoryevitch, for instance—he is not a high-class man, but just look at him: there is a serene dignity in his face. Even when he takes a pinch of ordinary snuff you can't help feeling respect for him. When he sings in the choir in the church there is no describing how touching it is. You feel as though you were melting . . . ! While that other. . . . But there, God bless the man. He thinks we cannot do without his tales. But here, you see, is a book of them without him.

I promised you, I remember, that in this book there should be my story too. And I did mean to put it in. But I found that for my story I should need three books of this size, at least. I did think of printing it separately, but I thought better of it. I know you: you would be laughing at the old man. No, I shall not!

PREFACE

Good-bye. It will be a long time before we meet again, if we ever do. But there, it would not matter to you if I never existed at all. One year will pass and then another—and none of you will remember or regret the old bee-keeper,

RUDY PANKO.

CHRISTMAS EVE

THE last day before Christmas had passed. A clear winter night had come; the stars peeped out; the moon rose majestically in the sky to light good people and all the world so that all might enjoy singing *kolyadki*¹ and praising the Lord. It was freezing harder than in the morning; but it was so still that the crunch of the snow under the boot could be heard half a mile away. Not one group of lads had appeared under the cottage windows yet; only the moon peeped in at them stealthily as though calling to the girls who were dressing up in their best to make haste and run out on the crunching snow. At that mo-

¹ Among us it is the custom to sing under the window on Christmas Eve carols that are called *kolyadki*. The mistress or master or whoever is left in the house always drops into the singer's bag some sausage or bread or a copper or whatever he has plenty of. It is said that once upon a time there was a blockhead called Kolyada who was taken to be a god and that these *kolyadki* came from that. Who knows? It is not for plain folk like us to give our opinion about it. Last year Father Osip was for forbidding them to sing *kolyadki* about the farms, saying that folk were honouring Satan by doing so, though to tell the truth there is not a word about Kolyada in the *kolyadki*. They often sing about the birth of Christ, and at the end wish good health to the master, the mistress, the children and all the household.—*(The Bee-keeper's Note.)*

ment the smoke rose in puffs from a cottage chimney and passed like a cloud over the sky, and a witch, astride a broomstick, rose up in the air together with the smoke.

If the assessor of Sorotchintsy, in his cap edged with lambskin and cut like an Uhlan's, in his dark blue greatcoat lined with black astrakhan, had driven by at that minute with his three hired horses and the fiendishly plaited whip with which it is his habit to urge on his coachman, he would certainly have noticed her, for there is not a witch in the world who could elude the eyes of the Sorotchintsy assessor. He can count on his fingers how many little pigs every peasant-woman's sow has farrowed and how much linen is lying in her chest and just which of her clothes and household belongings her goodman pawns on Sunday at the tavern. But the Sorotchintsy assessor did not drive by, and, indeed, what business is it of his? He has his own district. Meanwhile, the witch rose so high in the air that she was only a little black patch gleaming up aloft. But wherever that little patch appeared, there the stars one after another vanished. Soon the witch had gathered a whole sleeveful of them. Three or four were still shining. All at once from the opposite side another little patch appeared, grew larger, began to lengthen out and was no longer a little patch. A short-sighted man would never have made out what it was, even if he had put the wheels of the Commissar's chaise on his nose by way of spectacles. At first it looked like a regular German;¹ the narrow little face, con-

¹ Among us every one is called a German who comes from a foreign country; even if he is a Frenchman, a Hungarian, or a Swede—he is still a German.

tinually twisting and turning and sniffing at everything, ended in a little round heel, like our pigs' snouts; the legs were so thin, that if the mayor of Yareskovo had had legs like that, he would certainly have broken them in the first Cossack dance. But behind he was for all the world a district attorney in uniform, for he had a tail as long and pointed as the uniform coat-tails are nowadays. It was only from the goat-beard under his chin, from the little horns sticking upon his forehead, and from his being no whiter than a chimney-sweep, that one could tell that he was not a German or a district attorney, but simply the devil, who had one last night left him to wander about the wide world and teach good folk to sin. On the morrow when the first bells rang for matins, he would run with his tail between his legs straight off to his lair.

Meanwhile the devil stole silently up to the moon and stretched his hand out to seize it, but drew it back quickly as though he were scorched, sucked his fingers and danced about, then ran up from the other side and again skipped away and drew back his hand. But in spite of all his failures the sly devil did not give up his tricks. Running up, he suddenly seized the moon with both hands; grimacing and blowing, he kept flinging it from one hand to the other, like a peasant who has picked up an ember for his pipe with bare fingers; at last, he hurriedly put it in his pocket and ran on as though nothing had happened.

No one in Dikanka noticed that the devil had stolen the moon. It is true the district clerk, coming out of the tavern on all fours, saw the moon for no reason whatever dancing in the sky and swore he had to the whole village; but people shook their heads and even

made fun of him. But what motive led the devil to this lawless act? Why, this was how it was; he knew that the rich Cossack, Tchub, had been invited by the sacristan to a supper of frumenty at which a kinsman of the sacristan's, who had come from the bishop's choir, wore a dark blue coat and could take the very lowest bass-note, the mayor, the Cossack Sverbyguz and some others were to be present, and at which besides the Christmas frumenty there were to be mulled vodka, saffron vodka and good things of all sorts. And meanwhile his daughter, the greatest beauty in the village, was left at home, and there was no doubt that the blacksmith, a very strong and fine young fellow, would pay her a visit, and him the devil hated more than Father Kondrat's sermons. In his spare time the blacksmith had taken up painting and was reckoned the finest artist in the whole countryside. Even the Cossack officer L—ko, who was still strong and hearty in those days, sent for him to Poltava expressly to paint a paling fence round his house. All the bowls from which the Cossacks of Dikanka supped their beetroot soup had been painted by the blacksmith. He was a God-fearing man and often painted ikons of the saints: even now you may find his Luke the Evangelist in the church of T. But the triumph of his art was a picture painted on the church wall in the chapel on the right. In it he depicted St. Peter on the Day of Judgment with the keys in his hand driving the Evil Spirit out of hell; the frightened devil was running in all directions, foreseeing his doom, while the sinners, who had been imprisoned before, were chasing him and striking him with whips, blocks of wood and anything they could get hold of. While the artist was working at this pic-

ture and painting it on a big wooden board, the devil did all he could to hinder him; he gave him a nudge on the arm, unseen, blew some ashes from the forge in the smithy and scattered them on the picture; but, in spite of it all, the work was finished, the picture was brought into the church and let into the wall of the side-chapel, and from that day the devil has sworn to revenge himself on the blacksmith.

He had only one night left to wander upon earth; but he was looking for some means of venting his wrath on the blacksmith that night. And that was why he made up his mind to steal the moon, reckoning that old Tchub was lazy and slow to move, and the sacristan's cottage a good long step away: the road passed by cross paths beside the mills and the graveyard and went round a ravine. On a moonlight night mulled vodka and saffron vodka might have tempted Tchub; but in such darkness it was doubtful whether any one could drag him from the stove and bring him out of the cottage. And the blacksmith, who had for a long time been on bad terms with him, would on no account have ventured, strong as he was, to visit the daughter when the father was at home.

And so, as soon as the devil had hidden the moon in his pocket, it was at once so dark all over the world that not every one could have found the way to the tavern, let alone to the sacristan's. The witch gave a shriek when she suddenly found herself in darkness. Then the devil running up, all bows and smiles, put his arm round her and began whispering in her ear the sort of thing that is usually whispered to all the female sex. Things are queerly arranged in our world! All who live in it are always trying to outdo and imitate

one another. In old days the judge and the police-captain were the only ones in Mirgorod who used to wear cloth overcoats lined with sheepskin in the winter, while all the petty officials wore plain sheepskin; but nowadays the assessor and the chamberlain have managed to get themselves new cloth greatcoats lined with astrakhan. The year before last the treasury clerk and the district clerk bought dark blue duck at sixty kopecks the yard. The sexton has got himself nankeen trousers for the summer and a striped waistcoat of camel's hair. In fact every one tries to be somebody! When will folks give up being vain! I am ready to bet that many would be surprised to see the devil carrying on in that way. What is most annoying is that, no doubt, he fancies himself a handsome fellow, though his figure is a shameful sight. With a face, as Foma Grigoryevitch used to say, the abomination of abominations, yet even he plays the gallant! But in the sky and under the sky it was growing so dark that there was no seeing what followed between them.

"So you have not been to see the sacristan in his new cottage, mate?" said the Cossack Tchub coming out at his door to a tall lean peasant in a short sheepskin, whose stubby beard showed that for at least a fortnight it had not been touched by the broken piece of scythe with which for lack of a razor peasants usually shave their beards. "There will be a fine drinking-party there to-night!" Tchub went on, grinning as he spoke. "If only we are not late!"

Hereupon Tchub set straight the belt that closely girt his sheepskin, pulled his cap more firmly on his head, and gripped his whip, the terror and the menace of

tiresome dogs; but glancing upwards, he stopped. "What the devil! Look! look, Panas . . . !"

"What?" articulated his friend, and he too turned his face upwards.

"What, indeed! There is no moon!"

"What a nuisance! There really is no moon."

"That's just it, there isn't!" Tchub brought out with some annoyance at his friend's imperturbable indifference. "You don't care, I'll be bound."

"Well, what can I do about it?"

"Some devil," Tchub went on, wiping his moustaches with his sleeve, "must needs go and meddle - may he never have a glass of vodka to drink in the mornings, the dog! Upon my word, it's as though to mock us. . . . As I sat indoors I looked out of the window and the night was lovely! It was light, the snow was sparkling in the moonlight; you could see everything as though it were day. And here before I'm out of the door, you can't see your hand before your face! May he break his teeth on a crust of buck-wheat bread!"

Tchub went on grumbling and scolding for a long while, and at the same time he was hesitating what to decide. He had a desperate longing to gossip over all sorts of nonsense at the sacristan's, where no doubt the mayor was already sitting, as well as the bass choir-singer, and Mikita, the tar-dealer, who used to come once a fortnight on his way to Poltava, and who cracked such jokes that all the village worthies held their sides with laughing. Already in his mind's eye Tchub saw the mulled vodka on the table. All this was alluring, it is true, but the darkness of the night recalled the charms of laziness, so dear to every Cossack. How nice

it would be now to lie on the oven-step with his legs tucked under him, quietly smoking his pipe and listening through a luxurious drowsiness to the songs and carols of the light-hearted lads and lasses who gathered in groups under the windows! He would undoubtedly have decided on the latter course had he been alone; but for the two together, it was not so dreary and terrible to go through the dark night; besides he did not care to seem sluggish and cowardly to others. When he had finished scolding he turned again to his friend.

"So there is no moon, mate?"

"No!"

"It's strange really! Let me have a pinch of snuff! You have splendid snuff, mate! Where do you get it?"

"Splendid! Devil a bit of it!" answered the friend, shutting the birchbark snuff-box with patterns pricked out upon it. "It wouldn't make an old hen sneeze!"

"I remember," Tchub still went on, "the inn-keeper, Zuzulya, once brought me some snuff from Nyezhin. Ah, that was snuff! it was good snuff! So how is it to be, mate? It's dark, you know!"

"So maybe we'll stay at home," his friend brought out, taking hold of the door-handle.

If his friend had not said that, Tchub would certainly have made up his mind to stay at home; but now something seemed egging him on to oppose it. "No, mate, let us go! It won't do, we must go!"

Even as he was saying it, he was vexed with himself that he had said it. He very much disliked turning out on such a night, but it was a comfort to him that he was acting on his own decision and not following advice.

His friend looked round and scratched his shoulders with the handle of his whip, without the slightest sign

of vexation on his face, like a man to whom it is a matter of complete indifference whether he sits at home or turns out—and the two friends set off on their road.

Now let us see what Tchub's daughter, the beauty, was doing all by herself. Before Oksana was seventeen, people were talking about nothing but her in almost the whole world, both on this side of Dikanka and on the other side of Dikanka. The lads were all at one in declaring that there never had been and never would be a finer girl in the village. Oksana heard and knew all that was said about her and, like a beauty, was full of caprices. If, instead of a checked skirt and an apron, she had been dressed as a lady, she could never have kept a servant. The lads ran after her in crowds, but, losing patience, by degrees forsook the wilful beauty, and turned to others who were not so spoilt. Only the blacksmith was persistent and would not abandon his courtship, although he was treated not a whit better than the rest. When her father went out, Oksana spent a long while yet dressing herself in her best and prinking before a little looking-glass in a pewter frame; she could not tear herself away from admiring herself.

"What put it into folks' heads to spread it abroad that I am pretty?" she said, as it were without thinking, simply to talk to herself about something. "Folks lie, I am not pretty at all!"

But the fresh living face reflected in the looking-glass, in its childish youthfulness, with its sparkling black eyes and inexpressibly charming smile that stirred the soul, at once proved the contrary.

"Can my black eyebrows and my eyes," the beauty went on, still holding the mirror, "be so beautiful that

there are none like them in the world? What is there pretty in that turned-up nose, and in the cheeks and the lips? Is my black hair pretty? Ough, my curls might frighten one in the evening, they twist and twine round my head like long snakes! I see now that I am not pretty at all!" And, moving the looking-glass a little further away, she cried out: "No, I am pretty! Ah, how pretty! Wonderful! What a joy I shall be to the man whose wife I become! How my husband will admire me! He'll be wild with joy. He will kiss me to death!"

"Wonderful girl!" whispered the blacksmith, coming in softly. "And hasn't she a little conceit! She's been standing looking in the mirror for an hour and can't tear herself away, and praising herself aloud, too!"

"Yes, lads, I am a match for you? Just look at me!" the pretty coquette went on: "how gracefully I step: my shift is embroidered with red silk. And the ribbons on my head! You will never see richer braid! My father bought me all this that the finest young man in the world may marry me." And, laughing, she turned round and saw the blacksmith. . . .

She uttered a shriek and stood still, coldly facing him.

The blacksmith's hands dropped helplessly to his sides.

It is hard to describe what the dark face of the lovely girl expressed. There was sternness in it, and through the sternness a sort of defiance of the embarrassed blacksmith, and at the same time a hardly perceptible flush of vexation delicately suffused her face; and all this was so mingled and so indescribably pretty that to give her a million kisses was the best thing that could have been done at the moment.

"Why have you come here?" was how Oksana began. "Do you want me to shove you out of the door with a spade? You are all very clever at coming to see us. You sniff out in a minute when there are no fathers in the house. Oh, I know you! Well, is my chest ready?"

"It will be ready, my little heart, it will be ready after Christmas. If only you knew how I have worked at it; for two nights I didn't leave the smithy. But, there, no priest's wife will have a chest like it. The iron I bound it with is better than what I put on the officer's chariot, when I worked at Poltava. And how it will be painted! You won't find one like it if you wander over the whole neighbourhood with your little white feet! Red and blue flowers will be scattered over the whole ground. It will glow like fire. Don't be angry with me! Allow me at least to speak to you, to look at you!"

"Who's forbidding you? Speak and look!"

Hereupon she sat down on the bench, glanced again at the looking-glass and began arranging her hair. She looked at her neck, at her shift, embroidered in red silk, and a subtle feeling of complacency could be read on her lips and fresh cheeks, and was reflected in her eyes.

"Allow me to sit beside you," said the blacksmith.

"Sit down," said Oksana, with the same emotion still perceptible on her lips and in her gratified eyes.

"Wonderful, lovely Oksana, allow me to kiss you!" ventured the blacksmith, growing bolder, and he drew her towards him with the intention of snatching a kiss. But Oksana turned away her cheek, which had been exceeding close to the blacksmith's lips, and pushed him away.

"What more do you want? When there's honey he must have a spoonful! Go away, your hands are harder than iron. And you smell of smoke. I believe you have smeared me all over with your soot."

Then she picked up the looking-glass and began prinking again.

"She does not love me!" the blacksmith thought to himself, hanging his head. "It's all play to her while I stand before her like a fool and cannot take my eyes off her. And I should like to stand before her always and never to take my eyes off her! Wonderful girl! What would I not give to know what is in her heart, and whom she loves. But no, she cares for nobody. She is admiring herself; she is tormenting poor me, while I am so sad that everything is darkness to me. I love her as no man in the world ever has loved or ever will."

"Is it true that your mother's a witch?" Oksana brought out, and she laughed. And the blacksmith felt that everything within him was laughing. That laugh echoed as it were at once in his heart and in his softly thrilling veins, and for all that his soul was vexed that he had not the right to kiss that sweetly laughing face.

"What care I for mother? You are father and mother to me and all that is precious in the world. If the Tsar summoned me and said: 'Smith Vakula, ask me for all that is best in my kingdom, I will give you anything. I will bid them make you a golden forge and you shall work with silver hammers.' 'I don't care,' I should say to the Tsar, 'for precious stones or a golden forge nor for all your kingdom: give me rather my Oksana.'

"You see, what a fellow you are! Only my father's no fool either. You'll see that, when he doesn't marry your mother!" Oksana said, smiling slyly. "But the girls are not here. . . . What's the meaning of it? We ought to have been singing long ago, I am getting tired of waiting."

"Let them stay away, my beauty!"

"I should hope not! I expect the lads will come with them. And then there will be dances. I can fancy what funny stories they will tell!"

"So you'll be merry with them?"

"Yes, merrier than with you. Ah! some one knocked; I expect it is the girls and the lads."

"What's the use of my staying longer?" the blacksmith said to himself. "She is jeering at me. I am no more to her than an old rusty horseshoe. But if that's so, anyway I won't let another man laugh at me. If only I see for certain that she likes some one better than me, I'll teach him to keep off. . . ."

A knock at the door and a cry of "Open!" ringing out sharply in the frost interrupted his reflections.

"Stay, I'll open the door," said the blacksmith, and he went out intending in his vexation to break the ribs of any one who might be there.

The frost grew sharper, and up aloft it turned so cold that the devil kept hopping from one hoof to the other and blowing into his fists, trying to warm his frozen hands. And indeed it is small wonder that he should be cold, being used day after day to knocking about in hell, where, as we all know, it is not as cold as it is with us in winter, and where, putting on his cap and standing before the hearth, like a real cook, he fries

sinner with as much satisfaction as a peasant-woman fries a sausage at Christmas.

The witch herself felt that it was cold, although she was warmly clad; and so, throwing her arms upwards, she stood with one foot out, and putting herself into the attitude of a man flying along on skates, without moving a single muscle, she dropped through the air, as though on an ice-slope, and straight into her chimney.

The devil set off after her in the same way. But as the creature is nimbler than any dandy in stockings, there is no wonder that he reached the top of the chimney almost on the neck of his mistress, and both found themselves in a roomy oven among the pots.

The witch stealthily moved back the oven door to see whether her son, Vakula, had invited visitors to the cottage; but seeing that there was no one, except the sacks that lay in the middle of the floor, she crept out of the oven, flung off her warm pelisse, set herself to rights, and no one could have told that she had been riding on a broom the minute before.

Vakula's mother was not more than forty years old. She was neither handsome nor ugly. Indeed, it is hard to be handsome at such an age. However, she was so clever at alluring even the steadiest Cossacks (who, it may not be amiss to observe, do not care much about beauty) that the mayor and the sacristan, Osip Niki-forovitch (if his wife were not at home, of course), and the Cossack, Korny Tchub, and the Cossack, Kasian Sverbyguz, were all dancing attendance on her. And it must be said to her credit that she was very skilful in managing them: not one of them dreamed that he had a rival. If a God-fearing peasant or a gentleman (as the Cossacks call themselves) wearing a cape

with a hood went to church on Sunday or, if the weather was bad, to the tavern, how could he fail to look in on Soloha, eat curd dumplings with sour cream, and gossip in the warm cottage with its chatty and agreeable mistress? And the Cossack would purposely go a long way round before reaching the tavern, and would call that "looking in on his way." And when Soloha went to church on a holiday, dressed in a bright-checked *plabta*¹ with a cotton *zapaska*, and above it a dark blue overskirt on the back of which gold flourishes were embroidered, and took up her stand close to the right side of the choir, the sacristan would be sure to begin coughing and unconsciously screw up his eyes in her direction; the mayor would smooth his moustaches, begin twisting the curl behind his ear, and say to the man standing next to him: "Ah, a nice woman, a devil of a woman!" Soloha would bow to each one of them, and each one would think that she was bowing to him alone.

But any one fond of meddling in other people's business would notice at once that Soloha was most gracious to the Cossack Tchub. Tchub was a widower. Eight stacks of corn always stood before his cottage. Two pairs of stalwart oxen poked their heads out of the wattled barn by the roadside and mooed every time they saw their crony, the cow, or their uncle, the stout bull, pass. A bearded billy-goat used to clamber on to the very roof, from which he would bleat in a harsh voice like the police-captain's, taunting the turkeys when they came out into the yard, and turning his back when he saw his enemies, the boys, who used to jeer at his beard. In Tchub's trunks there was plenty of linen

¹ See p. 21.—(Translator's Note.)

and many full coats and old-fashioned over-dresses with gold lace on them; his wife had been fond of fine clothes. In his vegetable patch, besides poppies, cabbages and sunflowers, two fields were sown every year with tobacco. All this Soloha thought that it would not be amiss to join to her own farm, and, already reckoning in what good order it would be when it passed into her hands, she felt doubly well-disposed to old Tchub. And to prevent her son Vakula from courting Tchub's daughter¹ and succeeding in getting possession of it all himself (then he would very likely not let her interfere in anything), she had recourse to the common manœuvre of all dames of forty—that is, setting Tchub at loggerheads with the blacksmith as often as she could. Possibly these sly tricks and subtlety were the reason that the old women were beginning here and there, particularly when they had drunk a drop too much at some merry gathering, to say that Soloha was certainly a witch, that the lad Kizyakolupenko had seen a tail on her back no bigger than a peasant-woman's distaff; that, no longer ago than the Thursday before last, she had run across the road in the form of a black cat; that on one occasion a sow had run up to the priest's wife, had crowed like a cock, put Father Kondrat's cap on her head and run away again. . . .

It happened that just when the old women were talking about this, a cowherd, Tymish Korostyavy, came up. He did not fail to tell them how in the summer, just before St. Peter's Fast, when he had lain down to sleep in the stable, putting some straw under his head,

¹ Had her son married Tchub's daughter, she could not by the rules of the Russian Church have married Tchub.—
(Translator's Note.)

he saw with his own eyes a witch, with her hair down, in nothing but her shift, begin milking the cows, and he could not stir he was so spellbound, and she had smeared his lips with something so nasty that he was spitting the whole day afterwards. But all that was somewhat doubtful, for the only one who can see a witch is the assessor of Sorotchintsy. And so all the notable Cossacks waved their hands impatiently when they heard such tales. "They are lying, the bitches!" was their usual answer.

After she had crept out of the stove and set herself to rights, Soloha, like a good housewife, began tidying up and putting everything in its place; but she did not touch the sacks. "Vakula brought those in, let him take them out himself!" she thought. Meanwhile the devil, who had chanced to turn round just as he was flying into the chimney, had caught sight of Tchub arm-in-arm with his neighbour already a long way from home. Instantly he flew out of the chimney, cut across their road and began flinging up heaps of frozen snow in all directions. A blizzard sprang up. All was whiteness in the air. The snow zigzagged like network behind and in front and threatened to plaster up the eyes, the mouth and the ears of the friends. And the devil flew back to the chimney again in the firm conviction that Tchub would go back home with his neighbour, would find the blacksmith there and probably give him such a dressing-down that it would be a long time before he would be able to handle a brush and paint offensive caricatures.

As a matter of fact, as soon as the blizzard began and the wind blew straight in their faces, Tchub ex-

pressed his regret, and pulling his hood further down on his head showered abuse on himself, the devil and his friend. His annoyance was feigned, however. Tchub was really glad of the snowstorm. They had still eight times as far to go as they had gone already before they would reach the sacristan's. They turned round. The wind blew on the back of their heads, but they could see nothing through the whirling snow.

"Stay, mate! I fancy we are going wrong," said Tchub, after walking on a little. "I do not see a single cottage. Oh, what a snowstorm! You go a little that way, mate, and see whether you find the road, and meanwhile I'll look this way. It was the foul fiend put it into my head to go trudging out in such a storm! Don't forget to shout when you find the road. Oh what a heap of snow Satan has driven into my eyes!"

The road was not to be seen, however. Tchub's friend, turning off, wandered up and down in his long boots, and at last came straight upon the tavern. This lucky find so cheered him that he forgot everything and, shaking the snow off, walked straight in, not worrying himself in the least about the friend he had left on the road. Meanwhile Tchub fancied that he had found the road. Standing still, he fell to shouting at the top of his voice, but, seeing that his friend did not appear, he made up his mind to go on alone. After walking on a little he saw his own cottage. Snowdrifts lay all about it and on the roof. Clapping his frozen hands together, he began knocking at the door and shouting peremptorily to his daughter to open it.

"What do you want here?" the blacksmith called grimly, as he came out.

Tchub, recognising the blacksmith's voice, stepped

back a little. "Ah, no, it's not my cottage," he said to himself. "The blacksmith doesn't come into my cottage. Though, as I come to look well, it is not the blacksmith's either. Whose cottage can it be? I know! I didn't recognise it! It's where lame Levchenko lives, who has lately married a young wife. His is the only cottage that is like mine. I did think it was a little queer that I had reached home so soon. But Levchenko is at the sacristan's now, I know that. Why is the blacksmith here . . . ? Ah, a-ha! he comes to see his young wife. So that's it! Good . . . ! Now I understand it all."

"Who are you and what are you hanging about at people's doors for?" said the blacksmith more grimly than before, coming closer up to him.

"No, I am not going to tell him who I am," thought Tchub. "He'll give me a good drubbing, I shouldn't wonder, the damned brute." And, disguising his voice, he answered: "It's I, good man! I have come for your diversion to sing carols under your windows."

"Go to the devil with your carols!" Vakula shouted angrily. "Why are you standing there? Do you hear! Be off with you."

Tchub already had that prudent intention; but it annoyed him to be forced to obey the blacksmith's orders. It seemed as though some evil spirit nudged his arm and compelled him to say something contradictory. "Why are you bawling like that?" he said in the same voice. "I want to sing carols and that's enough!"

"A-ha! I see words aren't enough for you!" And upon that Tchub felt a very painful blow on his shoulder.

"So I see you are beginning to fight now!" he said, stepping back a little.

"Be off, be off!" shouted the blacksmith, giving Tchub another shove.

"Well, you are!" said Tchub in a voice that betrayed pain, annoyance and timidity. "You are fighting in earnest, I see, and hitting pretty hard, too."

"Be off, be off!" shouted the blacksmith, and slammed the door.

"Look, how he swaggered!" said Tchub when he was left alone in the road. "Just try going near him! What a fellow! He's a somebody! Do you suppose I won't have the law of you? No, my dear lad, I am going straight to the Commissar. I'll teach you! I don't care if you are a blacksmith and a painter. But I must look at my back and shoulders; I believe they are black and blue. The devil's son must have hit hard. It's a pity that it is cold, and I don't want to take off my pelisse. You wait, you fiend of a blacksmith; may the devil give you a drubbing and your smithy, too; I'll make you dance! Ah, the damned rascal! But, I say, he is not at home, now. I expect Soloha is all alone. H'm . . . it's not far off, I might go! It's such weather now that no one will come in on us. There's no saying what may happen. . . . Oh dear, how hard that damned blacksmith did whack!"

Here Tchub, rubbing his back, set off in a different direction. The agreeable possibilities awaiting him in a tryst with Soloha took off the pain a little and made him insensible even to the frost, the crackling of which could be heard on all the roads in spite of the howling of the storm. At moments a look of mawkish sweetness came into his face, though the blizzard soaped his

beard and moustaches with snow more briskly than any barber who tyrannically holds his victim by the nose. But if everything had not been hidden by the criss-cross of the snow, Tchub might have been seen long afterwards stopping and rubbing his back as he brought out: "The damned blacksmith did whack hard!" and then going on his way again.

While the nimble dandy with the tail and goat-beard was flying out of the chimney and back again into the chimney, the pouch which hung on a shoulder-belt at his side and in which he had put the stolen moon chanced to catch in something in the stove and came open—and the moon took advantage of this accident to fly up through the chimney of Soloha's cottage and to float smoothly through the sky. Everything was flooded with light. It was as though there had been no snowstorm. The snow sparkled, a broad silvery plain, studded with crystal stars. The frost seemed less cold. Groups of lads and girls appeared with sacks. Songs rang out, and under almost every cottage window were crowds of carol-singers.

How wonderful is the light of the moon! It is hard to put into words how pleasant it is on such a night to mingle in a group of singing, laughing girls and among lads ready for every jest and sport which the gaily smiling night can suggest. It is warm under the thick pelisse; the cheeks glow brighter than ever from the frost and Old Sly himself prompts to mischief.

Groups of girls with sacks burst into Tchub's cottage and gathered round Oksana. The blacksmith was deafened by the shouts, the laughter, the stories. They vied with one another in telling the beauty

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... in emptying their sacks and boasting
... the sausages and curd dumplings of
... had already gathered a fair harvest from
... Oksana seemed to be highly pleased and
... she chatted first with one and then with an-
... laughed without ceasing.

... and vexation the blacksmith looked
... gaily, and this time he cursed the carol-singing,
... he was passionately fond of it himself.

"Odarka!" said the light-hearted beauty, turning
... of the girls, "you have some new slippers. Ah,
... pretty! And with gold on them! It's nice for
... Odarka, you have a man who will buy you any-
... but I have no one to get me such splendid

... precious Oksana!" put in the black-
... and you slippers such as not many a

... Oksana, with a rapid and haughty glance
... like to know where you'll get hold
... such as I could put on my feet. Perhaps
... and bring me the very ones the Tsaritsa wears?"
... the sort she wants!" cried the crowd of girls,

... beauty went on proudly, "all of you be
... the blacksmith Vakula brings me the
... the Tsaritsa wears, here's my word on
... marry him that very day."

... the girls carried off the capricious beauty with them.
... I thought the blacksmith
... I laugh at myself! I won-
... don't think what I have done with my senses!
... not love me—well, let her go! As though

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there were no one in the world but Oksana. Thank
God, there are lots of fine girls besides her in the village.
And what is Oksana? She'll never make a good house-
wife; the only thing she is good at is dressing up.
No, it's enough! It's time I gave up playing the fool!"

But at the very time when the blacksmith was making
up his mind to be resolute, some evil spirit set floating
before him the laughing image of Oksana saying mock-
ingly, "Get me the Tsaritsa's slippers, blacksmith, and
I will marry you!" Everything within him was stirred
and he could think of nothing but Oksana.

The crowds of carol-singers, the lads in one party and
the girls in another, hurried from one street to the next.
But the blacksmith went on and saw nothing, and took
no part in the merrymaking which he had once loved
more than any.

Meanwhile the devil was making love in earnest at
Soloha's: kissed her hand with the same airs and graces
as the assessor does the priest's daughter's, put his hand
on his heart, sighed and said bluntly that, if she would
not consent to gratify his passion and reward his devo-
tion in the usual way, he was ready for anything: would
fling himself in the water and let his soul go straight to
hell. Soloha was not so cruel; besides, the devil as we
know was alone with her. She was fond of seeing a
crowd hanging about her and was rarely without com-
pany. That evening, however, she was expecting to
spend alone, because all the noteworthy inhabitants of
the village had been invited to keep Christmas Eve at
the sacristan's. But it turned out otherwise: the devil
had only just urged his suit, when suddenly they heard
a knock and the voice of the stalwart mayor. Soloha

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ran to open the door, while the nimble devil crept into a sack that was lying on the floor.

The mayor, after shaking the snow off his cap and drinking a glass of vodka from Soloha's hand, told her that he had not gone to the sacristan's because it had begun to snow; and, seeing a light in her cottage, had dropped in, meaning to spend the evening with her.

The mayor had hardly had time to say this when they heard a knock at the door and the voice of the sacristan. "Hide me somewhere," whispered the mayor. "I don't want to meet the sacristan now."

Soloha thought for some time where to hide so bulky a visitor; at last she selected the biggest coal-sack. She shot the coal out into a barrel, and the stalwart mayor, moustaches, head, pelisse and all, crept into the sack.

The sacristan walked in, clearing his throat and rubbing his hands, and told her that no one had come to his party and that he was heartily glad of this opportunity to enjoy a visit to her and was not afraid of the snowstorm. Then he went closer to her and, with a cough and a smirk, touched her plump bare arm with his long fingers and said with an air expressive both of slyness and satisfaction: "And what have you here, magnificent Soloha?" and saying this he stepped back a little.

"How do you mean? My arm, Osip Nikiforovitch!" answered Soloha.

"H'm! your arm! He—he—he!" cried the sacristan, highly delighted with his opening. And he paced up and down the room.

"And what have you here, incomparable Soloha . . . ?" he said with the same air, going up to her again, lightly

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touching her neck and skipping back again in the same way.

"As though you don't see, Osip Nikiforovitch!" answered Soloha; "my neck and my necklace on my neck."

"H'm! A necklace on your neck! He—he—he!" and the sacristan walked again up and down the room, rubbing his hands.

"And what have you here, incomparable Soloha . . . ?" There's no telling what the sacristan (a carnal-minded man) might have touched next with his long fingers, when suddenly they heard a knock at the door and the voice of the Cossack Tchub.

"Oh dear, some one who's not wanted!" cried the sacristan in alarm. "What now if I am caught here, a person of my position . . . ! It will come to Father Kondrat's ears. . . ."

But the sacristan's apprehensions were really of a different nature; he was more afraid that his doings might come to the knowledge of his better-half, whose terrible hand had already turned his thick mane into a very scanty one. "For God's sake, virtuous Soloha!" he said, trembling all over, "your lovingkindness, as it says in the Gospel of St. Luke, chapter thirt . . . thirt . . . What a knocking, oh dear, what a knocking! Ough, hide me somewhere!"

Soloha turned the coal out of another sack, and the sacristan, whose proportions were not too ample, crept into it and settled at the very bottom, so that another half-sack of coal might have been put in on the top of him.

"Good evening, Soloha!" said Tchub, as he came into the cottage. "Maybe you didn't expect me, eh? You

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didn't, did you? Perhaps I am in the way . . . ?" Tchub went on with a good-humoured and significant expression on his face, which betrayed that his slow-moving mind was at work and preparing to utter some sarcastic and amusing jest.

"Maybe you had some entertaining companion here . . . ! Maybe you have some one in hiding already? Eh?" And enchanted by this observation of his, Tchub laughed, inwardly triumphant at being the only man who enjoyed Soloha's favour. "Come, Soloha, let me have a drink of vodka now. I believe my throat's frozen stiff with this damned frost. God has sent us weather for Christmas Eve! How it has come on, do you hear, Soloha, how it has come on . . . ? Ah, my hands are stiff, I can't unbutton my sheepskin! How the storm has come on. . . "

"Open the door!" a voice rang out in the street accompanied by a thump on the door.

"Some one is knocking," said Tchub standing still.

"Open!" the shout rang out louder still.

"It's the blacksmith!" cried Tchub, catching up his pelisse. "I say, Soloha, put me where you like; for nothing in the world will I show myself to that damned brute. May he have a pimple as big as a haystack under each of his eyes, the devil's son!"

Soloha, herself alarmed, flew about like one distraught and, forgetting what she was doing, signed to Tchub to creep into the very same sack in which the sacristan was already sitting. The poor sacristan dared not betray his pain by a cough or a groan when the heavy Cossack sat down almost on his head and put a frozen boot on each side of his face.

The blacksmith walked in, not saying a word nor re-

moving his cap, and almost fell down on the bench. It could be seen that he was in a very bad humour.

At the very moment when Soloha was shutting the door after him, some one knocked at the door again. This was the Cossack Sverbyguz. He could not be hidden in the sack, because no sack big enough could be found anywhere. He was more corpulent than the mayor and taller than Tchub's neighbour Panas. And so Soloha led him into the kitchen-garden to hear from him there all that he had to tell her.

The blacksmith looked absent-mindedly at the corners of his cottage, listening from time to time to the voices of the carol-singers floating far away through the village. At last his eyes rested on the sacks. "Why are those sacks lying there? They ought to have been cleared away long ago. This foolish love has turned me quite silly. To-morrow's Christmas and rubbish of all sorts is still lying about the cottage. I'll carry them to the smithy!"

Hereupon the blacksmith stooped down to the huge sacks, tied them up more tightly and prepared to hoist them on his shoulders. But it was evident that his thoughts were straying. God knows where; or he would have heard how Tchub gasped when the hair of his head was twisted in the string that tied the sack and the stalwart mayor began hiccupping quite distinctly.

"Can nothing drive that wretched Oksana out of my head?" the blacksmith was saying. "I don't want to think about her; but I keep thinking and thinking and, as luck will have it, of her and nothing else. How is it that thoughts creep into the mind against the will? The devil! the sacks seem to have grown heavier than they were! Something besides coal must have been put into

them. I am a fool! I forget that now everything seems heavier to me. In old days I could bend and unbend again a copper coin or a horseshoe with one hand, and now I can't lift sacks of coal. I shall be blown over by the wind next. . . . No!" he cried, pulling himself together after a pause, "I am not a weak woman! I won't let any one make a mock of me! If there were ten such sacks, I would lift them all." And he briskly hoisted on his shoulders the sacks which two stalwart men could not have carried. "I'll take this one too," he went on, picking up the little one at the bottom of which the devil lay curled up. "I believe I put my tools in this one." Saying this he went out of the hut whistling the song: "I can't be bothered with a wife."

The singing, laughter and shouts sounded louder and louder in the streets. The crowds of jostling people were reinforced by newcomers from neighbouring villages. The lads were full of mischief and mad pranks. Often among the carols some gay song was heard which one of the young Cossacks had made up on the spot. All at once one of the crowd would let out a begging New Year's song instead of a carol and bawl at the top of his voice:

"Christmas faring!
Be not sparing!
A tart or pie, please!
Bowl of porridge!
String of sausage!"

A roar of laughter rewarded the wag. Little windows were thrown up and the withered hand of an old woman (the old women, together with the sedate fathers, were

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the only people left indoors) was thrust out with a sausage or a piece of pie.

The lads and the girls vied with one another in holding out their sacks and catching their booty. In one place the lads, coming together from all sides, surrounded a group of girls. There was loud noise and clamour; one flung a snowball, another pulled away a sack full of all sorts of good things. In another place, the girls caught a lad, gave him a kick and sent him flying headlong with his sack into the snow. It seemed as though they were ready to make merry the whole night through. And, as though of design, the night was so splendidly warm. And the light of the moon seemed brighter still from the glitter of the snow.

The blacksmith stood still with his sacks. He fancied he heard among the crowd of girls the voice and shrill laugh of Oksana. Every vein in his body throbbed; flinging the sacks on the ground so that the sacristan at the bottom groaned over the bruise he received, and the mayor gave a loud hiccup, he strolled with the little sack on his shoulders together with a group of lads after a crowd of girls, among whom he heard the voice of Oksana.

"Yes, it is she! She stands like a queen, her black eyes sparkling. A handsome lad is telling her something. It must be amusing, for she is laughing. But she is always laughing." As it were unconsciously, he could not say how, the blacksmith squeezed his way through the crowd and stood beside her.

"Oh, Vakula, you here! Good evening!" said the beauty, with the smile which almost drove Vakula mad. "Well, have you sung many carols? Oh, but what a little sack! And have you got the slippers that the

Tsaritsa wears? Get me the slippers and I will marry you . . . !" And laughing she ran off with the other girls.

The blacksmith stood as though rooted to the spot. "No, I cannot bear it; it's too much for me . . ." he brought out at last. "But, my God, why is she so fiendishly beautiful? Her eyes, her words and everything, well, they scorch me, they fairly scorch me. . . . No, I cannot master myself. It's time to put an end to it all. Damn my soul, I'll go and drown myself in the hole in the ice and it will all be over!"

Then with a resolute step he walked on, caught up the group of girls, overtook Oksana and said in a firm voice: "Farewell, Oksana! Find any lover you like, make a fool of whom you like; but me you will not see again in this world."

The beauty seemed amazed and would have said something, but with a wave of his hand the blacksmith ran away.

"Where are you off to, Vakula?" said the lads, seeing the blacksmith running.

"Good-bye, mates!" the blacksmith shouted in answer. "Please God we shall meet again in the other world, but we shall not walk together again in this. Farewell! Do not remember evil against me! Tell Father Kondrat to sing a requiem service for my sinful soul. Sinner that I am, for the sake of worldly things, I did not finish painting the candles for the ikons of the Wonder-worker and the Mother of God. All the goods which will be found in my chest are for the church. Farewell!"

Saying this, the blacksmith fell to running again with the sack upon his back.

"He is gone crazy!" said the lads.

"A lost soul!" an old woman, who was passing, muttered devoutly. "I must go and tell them that the blacksmith has hanged himself!"

Meanwhile, after running through several streets Vakula stopped to take breath. "Where am I running? he thought, "as though everything were over already. I'll try one way more: I'll go to the Zaporozhets, Paunchy Patsyuk; they say he knows all the devils and can do anything he likes. I'll go to him, for my soul is lost anyway!"

At that the devil, who had lain for a long while without moving, skipped for joy in the sack; but the blacksmith, fancying that he had somehow twitched the sack with his hand and caused the movement himself, gave the sack a punch with his stalwart fist and, shaking it on his shoulders, set off to Paunchy Patsyuk.

This Paunchy Patsyuk certainly at one time had been a Zaporozhets; but no one knew whether he had been turned out of the camp or whether he had run away from Zaporozhye of his own accord.

For a long time, ten years or perhaps fifteen, he had been living in Dikanka. At first he had lived like a true Zaporozhets: he had done no work, slept three-quarters of the day, ate as much as six mowers and drank almost a whole pailful at a time. He had somewhere to put it all, however, for though Patsyuk was not very tall he was fairly bulky in width. Moreover, the trousers he used to wear were so full that, however long a step he took, no trace of his leg was visible, and it seemed as though a wine-distiller's butt were moving down the street. Perhaps it was just this that gave rise

to his nickname, Paunchy. Before many weeks had passed after his coming to the village, every one had found out that he was a wizard. If any one were ill, he called in Patsyuk at once: Patsyuk had only to whisper a few words and it was as though the ailment had been lifted off by his hand. If it happened that a hungry gentleman was choked by a fishbone, Patsyuk could punch him so skilfully on the back that the bone went the proper way without causing any harm to the gentleman's throat. Of late years he was rarely seen anywhere. The reason of that was perhaps sloth, though possibly also the fact that it was every year becoming increasingly difficult for him to pass through a doorway. People had of late been obliged to go to him if they had need of him.

Not without some timidity, the blacksmith opened the door and saw Patsyuk sitting Turkish-fashion on the floor before a little tub on which stood a bowl of dumplings. This bowl stood as though purposely on a level with his mouth. Without moving a single finger, he bent his head a little towards the bowl and sipped the soup, from time to time catching the dumplings with his teeth.

"Well," thought Vakula to himself, "this fellow's even lazier than Tchub: he does eat with a spoon, anyway, while this fellow won't even lift his hand!"

Patsyuk must have been entirely engrossed with the dumplings, for he seemed to be quite unaware of the entrance of the blacksmith, who made him a very low bow as soon as he stepped on the threshold.

"I have come to ask you a favour, Patsyuk!" said Vakula, bowing again.

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Fat Patsyuk lifted his head and again began swallowing dumplings.

"They say that you—no offence meant . . ." the blacksmith said, taking heart, "I speak of this not by way of any insult to you—that you are a little akin to the devil."

When he had uttered these words, Vakula was alarmed, thinking that he had expressed himself too bluntly and had not sufficiently softened his language, and, expecting that Patsyuk would pick up the tub together with the bowl and fling them straight at his head, he turned aside a little and covered his face with his sleeve that the hot dumpling soup might not spatter it. But Patsyuk looked up and again began swallowing the dumplings.

The blacksmith, reassured, made up his mind to go on. "I have come to you, Patsyuk. God give you everything, goods of all sorts in abundance and bread in proportion!" (The blacksmith would sometimes throw in a fashionable word: he had got into the way of it during his stay in Poltava when he was painting the paling-fence for the officer.) "There is nothing but ruin before me, a sinner! Nothing in the world will help! What will be, will be. I have to ask help from the devil himself. Well, Patsyuk," the blacksmith brought out, seeing his unchanged silence, "what am I to do?"

"If you need the devil, then go to the devil," answered Patsyuk, not lifting his eyes to him, but still making away with the dumplings.

"It is for that that I have come to you," answered the blacksmith, dropping another bow to him. "I suppose

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that nobody in the world but you knows the way to him!"

Patsyuk answered not a word, but ate up the remaining dumplings. "Do me a kindness, good man, do not refuse me!" persisted the blacksmith. "Whether it is pork or sausage or buckwheat flour or linen, say—millet or anything else in case of need . . . as is usual between good people . . . we will not grudge it. Tell me at least how, for instance, to get on the road to him."

"He need not go far who has the devil on his shoulders!" Patsyuk pronounced carelessly, without changing his position.

Vakula fastened his eyes upon him as though the interpretation of those words were written on his brow. "What does he mean?" his face asked dumbly, while his mouth stood half-open ready to swallow the first word like a dumpling.

But Patsyuk was still silent.

Then Vakula noticed that there were neither dumplings nor a tub before him; but two wooden bowls were standing on the floor instead—one was filled with turnovers, the other with some cream. His thoughts and his eyes unconsciously fastened on these dainties. "Let us see," he said to himself, "how Patsyuk will eat the turnovers. He certainly won't want to bend down to lap them up like the dumplings; besides he couldn't—he must first dip the turnovers in the cream."

He had hardly time to think this when Patsyuk opened his mouth, looked at the turnovers and opened his mouth wider still. At that moment a turnover popped out of the bowl, splashed into the cream, turned over on the other side, leapt upwards and flew straight

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into his mouth. Patsyuk ate it up and opened his mouth again, and another turnover went through the same performance. The only trouble he took was to munch it up and swallow it.

"My word, what a miracle!" thought the blacksmith, his mouth dropping open with surprise, and at the same moment he was aware that a turnover was creeping towards him and was already smearing his mouth with cream. Pushing away the turnover and wiping his lips, the blacksmith began to reflect what marvels there are in the world and to what subtle devices the evil spirit may lead a man, saying to himself at the same time that no one but Patsyuk could help him.

"I'll bow to him once more, maybe he will explain properly. . . . The devil, though! Why, to-day is a fast day and he is eating turnovers with meat in them! What a fool I am really. I am standing here and making ready to sin! Back . . . !" And the pious blacksmith ran headlong out of the cottage.

But the devil sitting in the sack and already gloating over his prey could not endure to let such a glorious capture slip through his fingers. As soon as the blacksmith put down the sack the devil skipped out of it and mounted astride on his neck.

A cold shudder ran over the blacksmith's skin; pale and scared, he did not know what to do; he was on the point of crossing himself. . . . But the devil, putting his dog's nose down to Vakula's right ear, said: "It's I, your friend; I'll do anything for a friend and comrade! I'll give you as much money as you like," he squeaked into his left ear. "Oksana shall be yours this very day," he whispered, turning his nose again to the right ear. The blacksmith stood still, hesitating.

—Oh, no, he said at last, "for such a price I am
grateful to the owner."

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1. The first step is to identify the problem or question that needs to be answered. This involves understanding the context and the specific requirements of the task.

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off with my life: do not lay the terrible cross upon me!"

"Ah, so that's your ray now, you damned German! Now I know what to do. Carry me at once on yourself! Do you hear? And fly like a bird!"

"Whither?" asked the melancholy devil.

"To Petersburg, straight to the Tsaritsa!" And the blacksmith almost swooned with terror, as he felt himself mounting into the air.

Oksana stood for a long time pondering on the strange sayings of the blacksmith. Already an inner voice was telling her that she had treated him too cruelly. "What if he really does make up his mind to do something dreadful! I shouldn't wonder! Perhaps his sorrow will make him fall in love with another girl, and in his vexation he will begin calling her the greatest beauty in the village. But no, he loves me. I am so beautiful! He will not give me up for anything; he is playing, he is pretending. In ten minutes he will come back to look at me, for certain. I really was cross. I must, as though it were against my will, let him kiss me. Won't he be delighted!" And the frivolous beauty went back to jesting with her companions.

"Stay," said one of them, "the blacksmith has forgotten his sacks: look what terrible great sacks! He has made more by his carol-singing than we have. I fancy they must have put here quite a quarter of a sheep, and I am sure that there are no end of sausages and loaves in them. Glorious! we shall have enough to feast on for all Christmas week!"

"Are they the blacksmith's sacks?" asked Oksana. "We had better drag them to my cottage and have a good look at what he has put in them."

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"Very well," he said at last: "for such a price I am ready to be yours!"

The devil clasped his hands in delight and began galloping up and down on the blacksmith's neck. "Now the blacksmith is done for!" he thought to himself: "now I'll pay you out, my dear, for all your paintings and false tales thrown up at the devils! What will my comrades say now when they learn that the most pious man of the whole village is in my hands!"

Here the devil laughed with joy, thinking how he would taunt all the long-tailed crew in hell, how furious the lame devil, who was reckoned the most resourceful among them, would be.

"Well, Vakula!" piped the devil, not dismounting from his neck, as though afraid he might escape, "you know nothing is done without a contract."

"I am ready!" said the blacksmith. "I have heard that among you contracts are signed with blood. Stay, I'll get a nail out of my pocket!"

Here he put his hand behind him and caught the devil by the tail.

"What a man you are for a joke!" cried the devil, laughing. "Come, let go, that's enough mischief!"

"Wait a bit, friend!" cried the blacksmith, "and what do you think of this?" As he said that he made the sign of the cross and the devil became as meek as a lamb. "Wait a bit," said the blacksmith, pulling him by the tail to the ground: "I'll teach you to entice good men and honest Christians into sin."

Here the blacksmith leaped astride on the devil and lifted his hand to make the sign of the cross.

"Have mercy, Vakula!" the devil moaned piteously; "I will do anything you want, anything; only let me

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All the girls laughingly approved of this proposal. "But we can't lift them!" the whole group cried, trying to move the sacks.

"Wait a minute," said Oksana; "let us run for a sledge and take them away on it!"

And the crowd of girls ran out to get a sledge.

The captives were dreadfully bored with staying in the sacks, although the sacristan had poked a fair-sized hole to peep through. If there had been no one about, he might have found a way to creep out; but to creep out of a sack before everybody, to be a laughing stock . . . that thought restrained him, and he made up his mind to wait, only uttering a slight groan under Tchub's ill-mannered boots.

Tchub himself was no less desirous of freedom, feeling that there was something under him that was terribly uncomfortable to sit upon. But as soon as he heard his daughter's plan, he felt relieved and did not want to creep out, reflecting that it must be at least a hundred paces and perhaps two hundred to his hut; if he crept out, he would have to set himself to rights, button up his sheepskin, fasten his belt—such a lot of trouble! Besides, his winter cap had been left at Soloha's. Let the girls drag him in the sledge.

But things turned out not at all as Tchub was expecting. Just when the girls were running to fetch the sledge, his lean neighbour, Panas, came out of the tavern, upset and ill-humoured. The woman who kept the tavern could not be persuaded to serve him on credit. He thought to sit on in the tavern in the hope that some godly gentleman would come along and stand him treat; but as ill-luck would have it, all the gentlefolk were staying at home and like good Christians were eating

rice and honey in the bosom of their families. Meditating on the degeneration of manners and the hard heart of the Jewess who kept the tavern, Panas made his way up to the sacks and stopped in amazement. "My word, what sacks somebody has flung down in the road!" he said, looking about him in all directions. "I'll be bound there is pork in them. Some carol-singer is in luck to get so many gifts of all sorts! What terrible great sacks! Suppose they are only stuffed full of buckwheat cake and biscuits, that's worth having; if there should be nothing but flat-cakes in them, that would be welcome, too; the Jewess would give me a dram of vodka for each cake. Let's make haste and get them away before any one sees."

Here he flung on his shoulder the sack with Tchub and the sacristan in it, but felt it was too heavy. "No, it'll be too heavy for one to carry," he said; "and here by good luck comes the weaver Shapovalenko. Good evening, Ostap!"

"Good evening!" said the weaver, stopping.

"Where are you going?"

"Oh, nowhere in particular."

"Help me carry these sacks, good man! Some one has been singing carols, and has dropped them in the middle of the road. We'll go halves over the things."

"Sacks? sacks of what? White loaves or flatcakes?"

"Oh, all sorts of things, I expect."

They hurriedly pulled some sticks out of the fence, laid the sack on them and carried it on their shoulders.

"Where shall we take it? To the tavern?" the weaver asked on the way.

"That's just what I was thinking; but, you know, the damned Jewess won't trust us, she'll think we have

stolen it somewhere; besides, I have only just come from the tavern. We'll take it to my hut. No one will hinder us there, the wife's not at home."

"Are you sure she is not at home?" the prudent weaver inquired.

"Thank God that I am not quite a fool yet," said Panas; "the devil would hardly take me where she is. I expect she will be trailing round with the other women till daybreak."

"Who is there?" shouted Panas's wife, opening the door of the hut as she heard the noise in the porch made by the two friends with the sack. Panas was dumb-founded.

"Here's a go!" articulated the weaver, letting his hands fall.

Panas's wife was a treasure of a kind that is not uncommon in this world. Like her husband, she hardly ever stayed at home, but almost every day visited various cronies and well-to-do old women, flattered them and ate with good appetite at their expense; she only quarrelled with her husband in the mornings, as it was only then that she sometimes saw him. Their hut was twice as old as the district clerk's trousers; there was no straw in places on their thatched roof. Only the remnants of a fence could be seen, for every one, as he went out of his house, thought it unnecessary to take a stick for the dogs, relying on passing by Panas's kitchen garden and pulling one out of his fence. The stove was not heated for three days at a time. Whatever the tender wife managed to beg from good Christians she hid as far as possible out of her husband's reach, and often wantonly robbed him of his gains if he had not

had time to spend them on drink. In spite of his habitual imperturbability Panas did not like to give way to her, and consequently left his house every day with both eyes blackened, while his better-half, sighing and groaning, waddled off to tell her old friends of her husband's unmannerliness and the blows she had to put up with from him.

Now you can imagine how disconcerted were the weaver and Panas by this unexpected apparition. Dropping the sack, they stood before it, and concealed it with their skirts, but it was already too late; Panas's wife, though she did not see well with her old eyes, had observed the sack.

"Well, that's good!" she said, with a face which betrayed the joy of a vulture. "That's good, that you have gained so much, singing carols! That's how it always is with good Christians; but no, I expect you have filched it somewhere. Show me your sack at once, do you hear, show me this very minute!"

"The bald devil may show you, but we won't," said Panas, assuming a dignified air.

"What's it to do with you?" said the weaver. "We've sung the carols, not you."

"Yes, you will show me, you wretched drunkard!" screamed the wife, striking her tall husband on the chin with her fist and forcing her way towards the sack. But the weaver and Panas manfully defended the sack and compelled her to beat a retreat. Before they recovered themselves the wife ran out again with an oven-fork in her hands. She nimbly caught her husband a thwack on the arms and the weaver one on his back and reached the sack.

"Why did we let her pass?" said the weaver, coming to himself.

"Ay, we let her pass! Why did you let her pass?" said Panas coolly.

"Your oven-fork is made of iron, seemingly!" said the weaver after a brief silence, rubbing his back. "My wife bought one last year at the fair, gave twenty-five kopecks; that one's all right . . . it doesn't hurt. . . ."

Meanwhile the triumphant wife, setting the potlamp on the floor, untied the sack and peeped into it.

But her old eyes, which had so well described the sack, this time certainly deceived her.

"Oh, but there is a whole pig lying here!" she shrieked, clapping her hands in glee.

"A pig! Do you hear, a whole pig!" The weaver nudged Panas. "And it's all your fault."

"It can't be helped!" replied Panas, shrugging his shoulders.

"Can't be helped! Why are we standing still? Let us take away the sack! Here, come on! Go away, go away, it's our pig!" shouted the weaver, stepping forward.

"Go along, go along, you devilish woman! It's not your property!" said Panas, approaching.

His spouse picked up the oven-fork again, but at that moment Tchub crawled out of the sack and stood in the middle of the room, stretching like a man who has just woken up from a long sleep. Panas's wife shrieked, slapping her skirts, and they all stood with open mouths.

"Why did she say it was a pig, the silly! It's not a pig!" said Panas, gazing open-eyed.

"My word! What a man has been dropped into a sack!" said the weaver, staggering back in alarm. "You

may say what you please, you can burst if you like, but the foul fiend has had a hand in it. Why, he would not go through a window!"

"It's Tchub!" cried Panas, looking more closely.

"Why, who did you think it was?" said Tchub, laughing. "Well, haven't I played you a fine trick? I'll be bound you meant to eat me by way of pork! Wait a bit, I'll console you: there is something in the sack, if not a whole pig, it's certainly a little porker or some live beast. Something was continually moving under me."

The weaver and Panas flew to the sack, the lady of the house clutched at the other side of it, and the battle would have been renewed, had not the sacristan, seeing that now he had no chance of concealment, scrambled out of the sack of his own accord.

The woman, astounded, let go of the leg by which she was beginning to drag the sacristan out of the sack.

"Here's another of them!" cried the weaver in horror, "the devil knows what has happened to the world. . . . My head's going round. . . . Men are put into sacks instead of cakes or sausages!"

"It's the sacristan!" said Tchub, more surprised than any of them. "Well, there! you're a nice one, Soloha! To put one in a sack. . . . I thought at the time her hut was very full of sacks. . . . Now I understand it all: she had a couple of men hidden in each sack. While I thought it was only me she . . . So there you have her!"

The girls were a little surprised on finding that one sack was missing.

"Well, there is nothing for it, we must be content with this one," murmured Oksana.

The mayor made up his mind to keep quiet, reasoning that if he called out to them to untie the sack and let him out, the silly girls would run away in all directions; they would think that the devil was in the sack—and he would be left in the street till next day. Meanwhile the girls, linking arms together, flew like a whirlwind with the sledge over the crunching snow. Many of them sat on the sledge for fun; others even clambered on to the top of the mayor. The mayor made up his mind to endure everything.

At last they arrived, threw open the door into the outer room of the hut and dragged in the sack amid laughter.

"Let us see what is in it," they all cried, hastening to untie it.

At this point the hiccup which had tormented the mayor became so much worse that he began hiccupping and coughing loudly.

"Ah, there is some one in it!" they all shrieked, and rushed out of doors in horror.

"What the devil is it? Where are you tearing off to as though you were all possessed?" said Tchub, walking in at the door.

"Oh, daddy!" cried Oksana, "there is some one in the sack!"

"In the sack? Where did you get this sack?"

"The blacksmith threw it in the middle of the road," they all said at once.

"So that's it; didn't I say so?" Tchub thought to himself. "What are you frightened at? Let us look.

Come now, my man—I beg you won't be offended at our not addressing you by your proper name—crawl out of the sack!"

The mayor did crawl out.

"Oh!" shrieked the girls.

"So the mayor got into one, too," Tchub thought to himself in bewilderment, scanning him from head to foot. "Well, I'm blessed!" He could say nothing more.

The mayor himself was no less confused and did not know how to begin. "I expect it is a cold night," he said, addressing Tchub.

"There is a bit of a frost," answered Tchub. "Allow me to ask you what you rub your boots with, goose-fat or tar?" He had not meant to say that; he had meant to ask: "How did you get into that sack, mayor?" and he did not himself understand how he came to say something utterly different.

"Tar is better," said the mayor. "Well, good-night, Tchub!" and, pulling his winter cap down over his head, he walked out of the hut.

"Why was I such a fool as to ask him what he rubbed his boots with?" said Tchub, looking towards the door by which the mayor had gone out.

"Well, Soloha is a fine one! To put a man like that in a sack . . . ! My word, she is a devil of a woman! While I, poor fool . . . But where is that damned sack?"

"I flung it in the corner, there is nothing more in it," said Oksana.

"I know all about that; nothing in it, indeed! Give it here; there is another one in it! Shake it well. . . .

What, nothing? My word, the cursed woman! And to look at her she is like a saint, as though she had never tasted anything but lenten fare . . . !"

But we will leave Tchub to pour out his vexation at leisure and will go back to the blacksmith, for it must be past eight o'clock.

At first it seemed dreadful to Vakula, particularly when he rose up from the earth to such a height that he could see nothing below, and flew like a fly so close under the moon that if he had not bent down he would have caught his cap in it. But in a little while he gained confidence and even began mocking at the devil. (He was extremely amused by the way the devil sneezed and coughed when he took the little cyprus-wood cross off his neck and held it down to him. He purposely raised his hand to scratch his head, and the devil, thinking he was going to make the sign of the cross over him, flew along more swiftly than ever.) It was quite light at that height. The air was transparent, bathed in a light silvery mist. Everything was visible, and he could even see a wizard whisk by them like a hurricane, sitting in a pot, and the stars gathering together to play hide-and-seek, a whole swarm of spirits whirling away in a cloud, a devil dancing in the light of the moon and taking off his cap at the sight of the blacksmith galloping by, a broom flying back home, from which evidently a witch had just alighted at her destination. . . . And many nasty things besides they met. They all stopped at the sight of the blacksmith to stare at him for a moment, and then whirled off and went on their way again. The blacksmith flew on till all at once Petersburg flashed before him, glittering with lights. (There happened to be an illumination that day.) The

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devil, flying over the city gate, turned into a horse and the blacksmith found himself mounted on a fiery steed in the middle of the street.

My goodness! the clatter, the uproar, the brilliant light; the walls rose up, four storeys on each side; the thud of the horses' hoofs and the rumble of the wheels echoed and resounded from every quarter; houses seemed to start up out of the ground at every step; the bridges trembled; carriages raced along; sledge-drivers and postilions shouted; the snow crunched under the thousand sledges flying from all parts; people passing along on foot huddled together, crowded under the houses which were studded with little lamps, and their immense shadows flitted over the walls with their heads reaching the roofs and the chimneys.

The blacksmith looked about him in amazement. It seemed to him as though all the houses had fixed their innumerable fiery eyes upon him, watching. Good Lord! he saw so many gentlemen in cloth fur-lined overcoats that he did not know whom to take off his cap to. "Good gracious, what a lot of gentry here!" thought the blacksmith. "I fancy every one who comes along the street in a fur coat is the assessor and again the assessor! And those who are driving about in such wonderful chaises with glass windows, if they are not police-captains they certainly must be commissars or perhaps something grander still." His words were cut short by a question from the devil:

"Am I to go straight to the Tsaritsa?"

"No, I'm frightened," thought the blacksmith. "The Zaporozhtsy, who marched in the autumn through Dikanka, are stationed here, where I don't know. They

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came from the camp with papers for the Tsaritsa; anyway I might ask their advice. Hey, Satan! creep into my pocket and take me to the Zaporozhtsy!"

And in one minute the devil became so thin and small that he had no difficulty in creeping into the blacksmith's pocket. And before Vakula had time to look round he found himself in front of a big house, went up a staircase, hardly knowing what he was doing, opened a door and drew back a little from the brilliant light on seeing the smartly furnished room; but he regained confidence a little when he recognised the Zaporozhtsy who had ridden through Dikanka and now, sitting on silk-covered sofas, their tar-smeared boots tucked under them, were smoking the strongest tobacco, usually called "root."

"Good-day to you, gentlemen! God be with you, this is where we meet again," said the blacksmith, going up to them and swinging off a low bow.

"What man is that?" the one who was sitting just in front of the blacksmith asked another who was further away.

"You don't know me?" said the blacksmith. "It's I, Vakula, the blacksmith! When you rode through Dikanka in the autumn you stayed nearly two days with me. God give you all health and long years! And I put a new iron hoop on the front wheel of your chaise!"

"Oh!" said the same Zaporozhets, "it's that blacksmith who paints so well. Good-day to you, neighbour! How has God brought you here?"

"Oh, I just wanted to have a look round. I was told . . ."

"Well, neighbour," said the Zaporozhets, drawing

himself up with dignity and wishing to show he could speak Russian too, "well, it's a big city."

The blacksmith, too, wanted to keep up his credit and not to seem like a novice. Moreover, as we have had occasion to see before, he too could speak like a book.

"A considerable town!" he answered carelessly. "There is no denying the houses are very large, the pictures that are hanging up are uncommonly good. Many of the houses are painted with letters in gold leaf to exuberance. The configuration is superb, there is no other word for it!"

The Zaporozhtsy, hearing the blacksmith express himself so freely, drew the most flattering conclusions in regard to him.

"We will have a little more talk with you, neighbour; now we are going at once to the Tsaritsa."

"To the Tsaritsa? Oh, be so kind, gentlemen, as to take me with you!"

"You?" a Zaporozhets pronounced in the tone in which an old man speaks to his four-year-old charge when the latter asks to be sat on a real, big horse. "What would you do there? No, we can't do that. We are going to talk about our own affairs to the Tsaritsa." And his face assumed an expression of great significance.

"Do take me!" the blacksmith persisted.

"Ask them to!" he whispered softly to the devil, banging on the pocket with his fist.

He had hardly said this, when another Zaporozhets brought out: "Do let us take him, mates!"

"Yes, do let us take him!" others joined in.

"Put on the same dress as we are wearing, then."

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The blacksmith was hastily putting on a green tunic when all at once the door opened and a man covered with gold lace said it was time to go.

Again the blacksmith was moved to wonder, as he was whisked along in an immense coach swaying on springs, as four-storeyed houses raced by him on both sides and the rumbling pavement seemed to be moving under the horses' hoofs.

"My goodness, how light it is!" thought the blacksmith to himself. "At home it is not so light as this in the daytime."

The coaches stopped in front of the palace. The Zaporozhtsy got out, went into a magnificent vestibule and began ascending a brilliantly lighted staircase.

"What a staircase!" the blacksmith murmured to himself, "it's a pity to trample it with one's feet. What decorations! They say the stories tell lies! The devil a bit they do! My goodness! what banisters, what workmanship! Quite fifty roubles must have gone on the iron alone!"

When they had mounted the stairs, the Zaporozhtsy walked through the first drawing-room. The blacksmith followed them timidly, afraid of slipping on the parquet at every footstep. They walked through three drawing-rooms, the blacksmith still overwhelmed with admiration. On entering the fourth, he could not help going up to a picture hanging on the wall. It was the Holy Virgin with the Child in her arms.

"What a picture! What a wonderful painting!" he thought. "It seems to be speaking! It seems to be alive! And the Holy Child! It's pressing its little hands together and laughing, poor thing! And the colours! My goodness, what colours! I fancy there

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is not a kopeck-worth of ochre on it, it's all emerald green and crimson lake. And the blue simply glows! A fine piece of work! I expect the background was put in with the most expensive white lead. Wonderful as that painting is, though, this copper handle," he went on, going up to the door and fingering the lock, "is even more wonderful. Ah, what a fine finish! That's all done, I expect, by German blacksmiths and most expensive."

Perhaps the blacksmith would have gone on reflecting for a long time, if a flunkey in livery had not nudged his arm and reminded him not to lag behind the others. The Zaporozhtsy passed through two more rooms and then stopped. They were told to wait in the third, in which there was a group of several generals in gold-laced uniforms. The Zaporozhtsy bowed in all directions and stood all together.

A minute later, a rather thick-set man of majestic stature, wearing the uniform of a Hetman and yellow boots, walked in, accompanied by a regular suite. His hair was in disorder, he squinted a little, his face wore an expression of haughty dignity and the habit of command could be seen in every movement. All the generals, who had been walking up and down rather superciliously in their gold uniforms, bustled about and seemed with low bows to be hanging on every word he uttered and even on his slightest gesture, so as to fly at once to carry out his wishes. But the Hetman did not even notice all that: he barely nodded to them and went up to the Zaporozhtsy.

The Zaporozhtsy all bowed down to the ground.

"Are you all here?" he asked deliberately, speaking a little through his nose.

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"All, little father!" answered the Zaporozhtsy, bowing again.

"Don't forget to speak as I have told you!"

"No, little father, we will not forget."

"Is that the Tsar?" asked the blacksmith of one of the Zaporozhtsy.

"Tsar, indeed! It's Potyomkin himself," answered the other.

Voices were heard in the other room, and the blacksmith did not know which way to look for the number of ladies who walked in, wearing satin gowns with long trains, and courtiers in gold-laced coats with their hair tied in a tail at the back. He could see a blur of brilliance and nothing more.

The Zaporozhtsy all bowed down at once to the floor and cried out with one voice: "Have mercy, little mother, mercy!"

The blacksmith, too, though seeing nothing, stretched himself very zealously on the floor.

"Get up!" An imperious and at the same time pleasant voice sounded above them. Some of the courtiers bustled about and nudged the Zaporozhtsy.

"We will not get up, little mother! We will not get up! We will die, but we will not get up!" shouted the Zaporozhtsy.

Potyomkin bit his lips. At last he went up himself and whispered peremptorily to one of the Zaporozhtsy. They rose to their feet.

Then the blacksmith, too, ventured to raise his head, and saw standing before him a short and, indeed, rather stout woman with blue eyes, and at the same time with that majestically smiling air which was so well able to subdue everything and could only belong to a queen.

"His Excellency has promised to make me acquainted to-day with my people whom I have not hitherto seen," said the lady with the blue eyes, scrutinising the Zaporozhtsy with curiosity.

"Are you well cared for here?" she went on, going nearer to them.

"Thanks, little mother! The provisions they give us are excellent, though the mutton here is not at all like what we have in Zaporozhye . . . What does our daily fare matter . . . ?"

Potyomkin frowned, seeing that the Zaporozhtsy were saying something quite different from what he had taught them. . . .

One of the Zaporozhtsy, drawing himself up with dignity, stepped forward:

"Be gracious, little mother! How have your faithful people angered you? Have we taken the hand of the vile Tatar? Have we come to agreement with the Turk? Have we been false to you in deed or in thought? How have we lost your favour? First we heard that you were commanding fortresses to be built everywhere against us; then we heard you mean to turn us into carbineers; now we hear of new oppressions. Wherein are your Zaporozhye troops in fault? In having brought your army across the Perekop and helped your generals to slaughter the Tatars in the Crimea . . . ?"

Potyomkin carelessly rubbed with a little brush the diamonds with which his hands were studded and said nothing.

"What is it you want?" Catherine asked anxiously.

The Zaporozhtsy looked meaningfully at one another.

"Now is the time! The Tsaritsa asks what we

want!" the blacksmith said to himself, and he suddenly flopped down on the floor.

"Your Imperial Majesty, do not command me to be punished! Show me mercy! Of what, be it said without offence to your Imperial Graciousness, are the little slippers made that are on your feet? I fancy there is no Swede nor a shoemaker in any kingdom in the world can make them like that. Merciful heavens, if only my wife could wear slippers like that!"

The Empress laughed. The courtiers laughed too. Potyomkin frowned and smiled both together. The Zaporozhtsy began nudging the blacksmith under the arm, wondering whether he had not gone out of his mind.

"Stand up!" the Empress said graciously. "If you wish to have slippers like these, it is very easy to arrange it. Bring him at once the very best slippers with gold on them! Indeed, this simple-heartedness greatly pleases me! Here you have a subject worthy of your witty pen!" the Empress went on, turning to a gentleman with a full but rather pale face, who stood a little apart from the others and whose modest coat with big mother-of-pearl buttons on it showed that he was not one of the courtiers.

"You are too gracious, your Imperial Majesty. It needs a La Fontaine at least to do justice to it!" answered the man with the mother-of-pearl buttons, bowing.

"I tell you sincerely, I have not yet got over my delight at your 'Brigadier.' You read so wonderfully well! I have heard, though," the Empress went on, turning again to the Zaporozhtsy, "that none of you are married in the Syetch."

"What next, little mother! Why, you know yourself, a man cannot live without a wife," answered the same Zaporozhets who had talked to the blacksmith, and the blacksmith wondered, hearing him address the Tsaritsa as though purposely in coarse language, speaking like a peasant, at it is commonly called, though he could speak like a book.

"They are sly fellows!" he thought to himself. "I'll be bound he does not do that for nothing."

"We are not monks," the Zaporozhets went on, "but sinful folk. Ready like all honest Christians to fall into sin. There are among us many who have wives, but do not live with them in the Syetch. There are some who have wives in Poland; there are some who have wives in Ukraine; there are some who have wives even in Turkey."

At that moment they brought the blacksmith the slippers.

"My goodness, what fine embroidery!" he cried joyfully, taking the slippers. "Your Imperial Majesty! If the slippers on your feet are like this—and in them your Honour, I expect, goes sliding on the ice—what must the feet themselves be like! They must be made of pure sugar at least, I should think!"

The Empress, who had in fact very well-shaped and charming feet, could not help smiling at hearing such a compliment from the lips of a simple-hearted blacksmith, who in his Zaporozhets dress might be reckoned a handsome fellow in spite of his swarthy face.

Delighted with such gracious attention, the blacksmith would have liked to have cross-questioned the pretty Tsaritsa thoroughly about everything: whether it was true that tsars eat nothing but honey, fat bacon

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and suchlike; but, feeling that the Zaporozhtsy were digging him in the ribs, he made up his mind to keep quiet. And when the Empress, turning to the older men, began questioning them about their manner of life and customs in the Syetch, he, stepping back, stooped down to his pocket and said softly: "Hurry me away from here and make haste!" And at once he found himself outside the city gates.

"He is drowned! On my word he is drowned! May I never leave this spot if he is not drowned!" lisped the weaver's fat wife, standing with a group of Dikanka women in the middle of the street.

"Why, am I a liar then? Have I stolen any one's cow? Have I put the evil eye on some one, that I am not to be believed?" shouted a purple-nosed woman in a Cossack tunic, waving her arms. "May I never want to drink water again if old Dame Perepertchih didn't see with her own eyes the blacksmith hanging himself!"

"Has the blacksmith hanged himself? Well, I never!" said the mayor, coming out of Tchub's hut, and he stopped and pressed closer to the group.

"You had better say, may you never want to drink vodka, you old drunkard!" answered the weaver's wife. "He had need to be as mad as you to hang himself! He drowned himself! He drowned himself in the hole in the ice! I know that as well as I know that you were in the tavern just now."

"You disgrace! See what she throws up against me!" the woman with the purple nose retorted wrathfully. "You had better hold your tongue, you wretch!"

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Do you think I don't know that the sacristan comes to see you every evening?"

The weaver's wife flared up.

"What about the sacristan? Whom does the sacristan go to? What lies are you telling?"

"The sacristan?" piped the sacristan's wife, squeezing her way up to the combatants, in an old blue cotton coat lined with hareskin. "I'll let the sacristan know! Who was it said the sacristan?"

"Well, this is the lady the sacristan visits!" said the woman with the purple nose, pointing to the weaver's wife.

"So it's you, you bitch!" said the sacristan's wife, stepping up to the weaver's wife. "So it's you, is it, witch, who cast a spell over him and gave him a foul poison to make him come to you!"

"Get thee behind me, Satan!" said the weaver's wife, staggering back.

"Oh, you cursed witch, may you never live to see your children! Wretched creature! Tfool!"

Here the sacristan's wife spat straight into the other woman's face.

The weaver's wife endeavoured to do the same, but spat instead on the unshaven chin of the mayor, who had come close up to the combatants that he might hear the quarrel better.

"Ah, nasty woman!" cried the mayor, wiping his face with the skirt of his coat and lifting his whip.

This gesture sent them all flying in different directions, scolding loudly.

"How disgusting!" repeated the mayor, still wiping his face. "So the blacksmith is drowned! My goodness! What a fine painter he was! What good

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knives and reaping-hooks and ploughs he could forge! What a strong man he was! Yes," he went on musing; "there are not many fellows like that in our village. To be sure, I did notice while I was in that damned sack that the poor fellow was very much depressed. So that is the end of the blacksmith! He was and is not! And I was meaning to have my dapple mare shod . . . !" And filled with such Christian reflections, the mayor quietly made his way to his own cottage.

Oksana was much troubled when the news reached her. She put little faith in Dame Perepertchih's having seen it and in the women's talk; she knew that the blacksmith was rather too pious a man to bring himself to send his soul to perdition. But what if he really had gone away, intending never to return to the village? And, indeed, in any place it would be hard to find as fine a fellow as the blacksmith. And how he loved her! He had borne with her caprices longer than any one of them. . . . All night long the beauty turned over from her right side to her left and her left to her right, and could not go to sleep. Now tossing in bewitching nakedness which the darkness concealed even from herself, she reviled herself almost aloud; now growing quieter, made up her mind to think of nothing—and kept thinking all the time. She was in a perfect fever, and by the morning head over ears in love with the blacksmith.

Tchub expressed neither pleasure nor sorrow at Vakulas' fate. His thoughts were absorbed by one subject: he could not forget the treachery of Soloha and never left off abusing her even in his sleep.

Morning came. Even before daybreak the church

was full of people. Elderly women in white linen wimples, in white cloth tunics, crossed themselves piously at the church porch. Ladies in green and yellow blouses, some even in dark blue overdresses with gold streamers behind, stood in front of them. Girls who had a whole shopful of ribbons twined on their heads, and necklaces, crosses, and coins round their necks, tried to make their way closer to the ikon-stand. But in front of all stood the gentlemen and humble peasants with moustaches, with forelocks, with thick necks and newly-shaven chins, for the most part wearing hooded cloaks, below which peeped a white or sometimes a dark blue jacket. Wherever one looked every face had a festive air. The mayor was licking his lips in anticipation of the sausage with which he would break his fast; the girls were thinking how they would slide with the lads on the ice; the old woman murmured prayers more zealously than ever. All over the church one could hear the Cossack Sverbyguz bowing to the ground. Only Oksana stood feeling unlike herself: she prayed without praying. So many different feelings, each more amazing, each more distressing than the other, crowded upon her heart that her face expressed nothing but overwhelming confusion; tears quivered in her eyes. The girls could not think why it was and did not suspect that the blacksmith was responsible. However, not only Oksana was concerned about the blacksmith. All the villagers observed that the holiday did not seem like a holiday, that something was lacking. To make things worse, the sacristan was hoarse after his travels in the sack and he wheezed scarcely audibly; it is true that the chorister who was on a visit to the village sang the bass splendidly, but

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would have been if they had had
who used always when they were
the *Holy Cherubim* to step up
there sing it with the same
in Poltava. Moreover, he
of a churchwarden. Matins
matins mass was over. . . .
the blacksmith have vanished to?
the devil flew even more swiftly
and in a trice Vakula found
At that moment the

cried the blacksmith, catch-
he was about to run away.
not all: I haven't thanked
a switch, he gave him three
like a peasant
the tax-assessor. And
ing and fooling others, the
himself. After that
room, made himself a hole
ladder-time. When he woke
that the sun was already
and missed matins and

overwhelmed with
as a punishment
ning his soul, had sent
prevented him from even
holiday. However,
thought that next week he
that from that
a day for a

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whole year, he glanced into the cottage; but there was
no one there. Apparently Soloha had not yet returned.

Carefully he drew out from the breast of his coat the
slippers and again marvelled at the costly workman-
ship and wonderful adventure of the previous night.
He washed and dressed himself in his best, put on the
very clothes which he had got from the Zaporozhtsy,
took out of a chest a new cap of good astrakhan with a
dark blue top not once worn since he had bought it
while staying in Poltava; he also took out a new girdle
of rainbow colours; he put all this together with a whip
in a kerchief and set off straight to see Tchub.

Tchub opened his eyes wide when the blacksmith
walked into his cottage, and did not know what to
wonder at most, the blacksmith's having risen from the
dead, the blacksmith's having dared to come to see him,
or the blacksmith's being dressed up such a dandy, like
a Zaporozhets. But he was even more astonished when
Vakula untied the kerchief and laid before him a new
cap and a girdle such as had never been seen in the
village, and then plumped down on his knees before
him, and said in a tone of entreaty: "Have mercy,
father! Be not wroth! Here is a whip; beat me as
much as your heart may desire. I give myself up, I
repent of everything! Beat, but only be not wroth.
You were once a comrade of my father's, you ate bread
and salt together and drank the cup of goodwill."

It was not without secret satisfaction that Tchub saw
the blacksmith, who had never knocked under to any
one in the village and who could twist five-kopeck
pieces and horseshoes in his hands like pancakes, lying
now at his feet. In order to keep up his dignity still
further, Tchub took the whip and gave him three

how much better it would have been if they had had the blacksmith too, who used always when they were singing *Our Father* or the *Holy Cherubim* to step up into the choir and from there sing it with the same chant with which it is sung in Poltava. Moreover, he alone performed the duty of a churchwarden. Matins were already over; after matins mass was over. . . . Where indeed could the blacksmith have vanished to?

It was still night as the devil flew even more swiftly back with the blacksmith, and in a trice Vakula found himself inside his own cottage. At that moment the cock crowed.

"Where are you off to?" cried the blacksmith, catching the devil by his tail as he was about to run away. "Wait a bit, friend, that's not all: I haven't thanked you yet." Then, seizing a switch, he gave him three lashes and the poor devil set to running like a peasant who has just had a hiding from the tax-assessor. And so, instead of tricking, tempting and fooling others, the enemy of mankind was fooled himself. After that Vakula went into the outer room, made himself a hole in the hay and slept till dinner-time. When he woke up he was frightened at seeing that the sun was already high. "I've overslept myself and missed matins and mass!"

Then the worthy blacksmith was overwhelmed with distress, thinking that no doubt God, as a punishment for his sinful intention of damning his soul, had sent this heavy sleep, which had prevented him from even being in church on this solemn holiday. However, comforting himself with the thought that next week he would confess all this to the priest and that from that day he would begin making fifty bows a day for a

whole year, he glanced into the cottage; but there was no one there. Apparently Soloha had not yet returned.

Carefully he drew out from the breast of his coat the slippers and again marvelled at the costly workmanship and wonderful adventure of the previous night. He washed and dressed himself in his best, put on the very clothes which he had got from the Zaporozhtsy, took out of a chest a new cap of good astrakhan with a dark blue top not once worn since he had bought it while staying in Poltava; he also took out a new girdle of rainbow colours; he put all this together with a whip in a kerchief and set off straight to see Tchub.

Tchub opened his eyes wide when the blacksmith walked into his cottage, and did not know what to wonder at most, the blacksmith's having risen from the dead, the blacksmith's having dared to come to see him, or the blacksmith's being dressed up such a dandy, like a Zaporozhets. But he was even more astonished when Vakula untied the kerchief and laid before him a new cap and a girdle such as had never been seen in the village, and then plumped down on his knees before him, and said in a tone of entreaty: "Have mercy, father! Be not wroth! Here is a whip; beat me as much as your heart may desire. I give myself up, I repent of everything! Beat, but only be not wroth. You were once a comrade of my father's, you ate bread and salt together and drank the cup of goodwill."

It was not without secret satisfaction that Tchub saw the blacksmith, who had never knocked under to any one in the village and who could twist five-kopeck pieces and horseshoes in his hands like pancakes, lying now at his feet. In order to keep up his dignity still further, Tchub took the whip and gave him three

strokes on the back. "Well, that's enough; get up! Always obey the old! Let us forget everything that has passed between us. Come, tell me now what is it that you want?"

"Give me Oksana to wife, father!"

Tchub thought a little, looked at the cap and the girdle. The cap was delightful and the girdle, too, was not inferior to it; he thought of the treacherous Soloha and said resolutely: "Good! send the matchmakers!"

"Aïe!" shrieked Oksana, as she crossed the threshold and saw the blacksmith, and she gazed at him with astonishment and delight.

"Look, what slippers I have brought you!" said Vakula, "they are the same as the Tsaritsa wears!"

"No, no! I don't want slippers!" she said, waving her arms and keeping her eyes fixed upon him. "I am ready without slippers. . . ." She blushed and could say no more.

The blacksmith went up to her and took her by the hand; the beauty looked down. Never before had she looked so exquisitely lovely. The enchanted blacksmith gently kissed her; her face flushed crimson and she was even lovelier still.

The bishop of blessed memory was driving through Dikanka. He admired the site on which the village stands, and as he drove down the street stopped before a new cottage.

"And whose is this cottage so gaily painted?" asked his reverence of a beautiful woman, who was standing near the door with a baby in her arms.

"The blacksmith Vakula's!" Oksana, for it was she, told him, bowing.

"Splendid! splendid work!" said his reverence, examining the doors and windows. The windows were all outlined with a ring of red paint; everywhere on the doors there were Cossacks on horseback with pipes in their teeth.

But his reverence was even warmer in his praise of Vakula when he learned that by way of church penance he had painted free of charge the whole of the left choir green with red flowers.

But that was not all. On the wall, to one side as you go in at the church, Vakula had painted the devil in hell—such a loathsome figure that every one spat as he passed. And the women would take a child up to the picture, if it would go on crying in their arms, and would say: "There, look! What a fright!" And the child, restraining its tears, would steal a glance at the picture and nestle closer to its mother.

A TERRIBLE REVENGE

THERE was a bustle and an uproar in a quarter of Kiev: the Esaul¹ Gorobets was celebrating his son's wedding. A great many people had come as guests to the wedding. In old days they liked good fare, better still liked drinking, and best of all they liked merry-making. Among others the Zaporozhets Mikitka came on his sorrel horse straight from a riotous feast at the Pereshlay Plain where for seven days and seven nights he had been giving the Polish king's soldiers red wine to drink. The Esaul's adopted brother, Danilo Burulbash, came too, with his young wife Katerina and his twelve-months-old son, from beyond the Dnieper where his homestead lay between two mountains. The guests marvelled at the fair face of the young wife Katerina, her eyebrows as black as German velvet, her smart cloth dress and underskirt of blue silk and her boots with silver heels; but they marvelled still more that her old father had not come with her. He had been living in that region for scarcely a year, and for twenty-one years before nothing had been heard of him and he had only come back to his daughter when she was married and had borne a son. No doubt he would have many strange stories to tell. How

¹ *I.e.* Captain of Cossacks.—(Translator's Note.)

A TERRIBLE REVENGE

could he fail to have them, after being so long in foreign parts! Everything there is different: the people are not the same and there are no Christian churches. . . . But he had not come.

They brought the guests mulled vodka with raisins and plums in it and a wedding loaf on a big dish. The musicians fell to upon the bottom crust in which coins had been baked and put their fiddles, cymbals and tambourines down for a brief rest. Meanwhile the girls and young women, after wiping their mouths with embroidered handkerchiefs, stepped out again; and the lads, putting their arms akimbo and looking haughtily about them, were on the point of going to meet them, when the old Esaul brought out two ikons to bless the young couple. These ikons had come to him from the venerable hermit, Father Varfolomey. They had no rich setting, there was no gleam of gold or silver on them, but no evil power dare approach the man in whose house they stand. Raising the ikons on high the Esaul was about to deliver a brief prayer . . . when all at once the children playing on the ground cried out in terror, and the people drew back, and every one pointed with their fingers in alarm at a Cossack who was standing in their midst. Who he was nobody knew. But he had already danced splendidly and had diverted the people standing round him. But when the Esaul lifted up the ikons at once the Cossack's face completely changed: his nose grew bigger and twisted to one side, his dancing eyes turned from brown to green, his lips turned blue, his chin quivered and grew pointed like a spear, a tusk peeped out of his mouth, a hump appeared behind his head, and the Cossack turned into an old man.

"It is he! It is he!" shouted the crowd, huddling close together.

"The wizard has appeared again!" cried the mothers, snatching up their children.

Majestically and with dignity the Esaul stepped forward and, turning the ikons towards him, said in a loud voice: "Avaunt, image of Satan! this is no place for you!" And, hissing and clacking his teeth like a wolf, the strange old man vanished.

Talk and conjecture arose among the people and the hubbub was like the roar of the sea in bad weather.

"What is this wizard?" asked the young people who knew nothing about him.

"There will be trouble!" muttered their elders, shaking their heads. And everywhere about the spacious courtyard folks gathered in groups listening to the story of the dreadful wizard. But almost every one told it differently and no one could tell anything certain about him.

A barrel of mead was rolled out and many gallons of Greek wine were brought into the yard. The guests regained their light-heartedness. The orchestra struck up—the girls, the young women, the gallant Cossacks in their gay-coloured coats flew round in the dance. After a glass, old folks of ninety, of a hundred, fell to dancing too, remembering the years that had not passed in vain. They feasted till late into the night and feasted as none feast nowadays. The guests began to disperse, but only a few made their way home: many of them stayed to spend the night in the Esaul's wide courtyard; and even more Cossacks dropped to sleep uninvited under the benches, on the floor, by their

horses, by the stables; wherever the tipplers stumbled there they lay, snoring for the whole town to hear.

II

There was a soft light all over the earth: the moon had come up from behind the mountain. It covered the steep bank of the Dnieper as with a costly damask muslin, white as snow, and the shadows drew back further into the pine forest.

A boat, hollowed out of an oak tree, was floating in the Dnieper. Two lads were sitting in the bow; their black Cossack caps were cocked on one side, and the drops flew in all directions from their oars like sparks from a flint.

Why were the Cossacks not singing? Why were they not telling of the Polish priests who go about the Ukraine forcing the Cossack people to turn Catholic, or of the two days' fight with the Tatars at the Salt Lake? How could they sing, how could they tell of gallant deeds? Their lord, Danilo, was plunged in thought, and the sleeve of his crimson tunic hung out of the boat and was dipped in the water; their mistress, Katerina, was softly rocking her child and keeping her eyes fixed upon it, while her gala cloth gown was splashed by the spray like fine grey dust and unguarded by the linen cover.

Sweet it is to look from mid-Dnieper at the lofty mountains, at the broad meadows, at the green forests! Those mountains are not mountains: they end in peaks below, as above, and both under and above them lie the high heavens. Those forests on the hills are not forests: they are the hair that covers the shaggy head of

the wood-demon. Down below he washes his beard in the water, and under his beard and over his head lie the high heavens. Those meadows are not meadows: they are a green girdle encircling the round sky; and above and below the moon hovers over them.

Lord Danilo looks not about him; he looks at his young wife. "Why are you plunged in sadness, my young wife, my golden Katerina?"

"I am not plunged in sadness, my lord Danilo! I am full of dread at the strange tales of the wizard. They say he was born so terrible to look at . . . and not one of the children would play with him. Listen, my lord Danilo, what dreadful things they say: he fancied all were mocking at him. If he met a man in the dark he thought that he opened his mouth and grinned at him; and next day they found that man dead. I marvelled and was frightened hearing those tales," said Katerina, taking out a kerchief and wiping the face of the sleeping child. The kerchief had been embroidered by her with leaves and fruits in red silk.

Lord Danilo said not a word, but looked into the darkness where far away beyond the forest there was the dark ridge of an earthen wall and beyond the wall rose an old castle. Three lines furrowed his brow; his left hand stroked his gallant moustaches.

"It is not that he is a wizard that is cause for fear," he said, "but that he is an evil guest. What whim has brought him hither? I have heard say that the Poles mean to build a fort to cut off our way to the Zaporozhtsy. That may be true. . . . I will scatter that devil's nest if any rumour reaches me that he harbours our foes there. I will burn the old wizard so that even the crows will find nought to peck at. Moreover,

I fancy he lacks not store of gold and wealth of all kinds. 'Tis there the devil lives! If he has gold. . . . We shall soon row by the crosses—that's the graveyard! There lie his evil forefathers. I am told they were all ready to sell themselves to Satan for a brass farthing—soul and threadbare coat and all. If truly he has gold, there is no need to tarry: there is not always booty to be won in war. . . ."

"I know what you are planning: my heart bodes no good from your meeting him. But you are breathing so hard, you are looking so fierce, your brows are knitted so angrily above your eyes . . ."

"Hold your peace, woman!" said Danilo wrathfully. "If one has dealings with you, one will turn woman oneself. Lad, give me a light for my pipe!" Here he turned to one of the rowers who, knocking some hot ash from his pipe, began putting it into his master's. "She would scare me with the wizard!" Danilo went on. "A Cossack, thank God, fears neither devil nor Polish priest. What should we come to if we listened to women? No good, should we, lads? The best wife for us is a pipe and a sharp sword!"

Katerina sat silent, looking down into the slumbering river; and the wind ruffled the water into eddies and all Dnieper shimmered with silver like a wolf's skin in the night.

The boat turned and hugged the wooded bank. A graveyard came into sight; tumble-down crosses stood huddled together. No guelder-rose grows among them, no grass is green there; only the moon warms them from the heavenly heights.

"Do you hear the shouts, lads? Some one is calling for our help!" said Danilo, turning to his oarsmen.

"We hear shouts, and seemingly from that bank," the two lads cried together, pointing to the graveyard.

But all was still again. The boat turned, following the curve of the projecting bank. All at once the rowers dropped their oars and stared before them without moving. Danilo stopped too: a chill of horror ran through the Cossack's veins.

A cross on one of the graves tottered and a withered corpse rose up out of the earth. Its beard reached to the waist; the nails on its fingers were longer than the fingers themselves. It slowly raised its hands upwards. Its face was all twisted and distorted. One could see it was suffering terrible torments. "I am stifling, stifling!" it moaned in a strange, unhuman voice. Its voice seemed to scrape on the heart like a knife, and suddenly it disappeared under the earth. Another cross tottered and again a dead body came forth, more terrible and taller than the one before; it was all hairy, with a beard to its knees and even longer claws. Still more terribly it shouted: "I am stifling," and vanished into the earth. A third cross tottered, a third corpse appeared. It seemed like a skeleton rising from the earth; its beard reached to its heels; the nails on its fingers pierced the ground. Terribly it raised its hands towards the sky as though it would seize the moon, and shrieked as though some one were sawing its yellow bones. . . .

The child asleep on Katerina's lap screamed and woke up; the lady screamed too; the oarsmen let their caps fall in the river; even their master shuddered.

Suddenly it all vanished as though it had never been; but it was a long time before the rowers took up their oars again. Burulbash looked anxiously at his young

wife who, panic-stricken, was rocking the screaming child in her arms; he pressed her to his heart and kissed her on the forehead.

"Fear not, Katerina! Look, there is nought!" he said, pointing around. "'Tis the wizard who would frighten folk, that none may dare break into his foul nest. He will but scare women by that! Let me hold my son!"

With those words Danilo lifted up his son and kissed him. "Why, Ivan, you are not afraid of wizards, are you? Say: 'Nay, daddy, I'm a Cossack!' Stop, give over crying! soon we shall be home! Then mother will give you your porridge, put you to bed in your cradle, and sing:

'Lullaby, my little son,
Lullaby to sleep!
Play about and grow a man!
To the glory of the Cossacks
And confusion of our foes.'

Listen, Katerina! I fancy that your father will not live at peace with us. He was sullen, gloomy, as though angry when he came. . . . If he doesn't like it, why come? He would not drink to Cossack freedom! He has never dandled the child! At first I would have trusted him with all that lay in my heart, but I could not do it, the works stuck in my throat. No, he has not a Cossack heart! When Cossack hearts meet, they almost leap out of the breast to greet each other! Well, my dear lads, is the bank near? I will give you new caps. You, Stetsko, I will give one made of velvet and gold. I took it from a Tatar with his head; all his

"We hear shouts, and seen the two lads joined together, pe

But all was still again. The curve of the projecting rowers dropped their oars and out moving. Danilo stopped through the Cossack's veins.

A cross on the grave corpse rose up out of the earth the waist; the nails on its thin fingers themselves. It slowly its face was twisted and it was suffering terrible to stifling!" it moaned in a strange voice seemed to scrape on the suddenly it disappeared under tottered and again a dead horrible and taller than the one with a beard to its knees and more terribly it shouted: "I into the earth. A third cross appeared. It seemed like a earth; its head reached to fingers pierced the ground. towards the sky as though and shrieked as though some low bones.

The child sleep on Kat woke up; the lady screamed caps fall in the river, even

Suddenly all vanished at but it was a long time before oars again. Barulbash look

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Burulbash did not wake early after the merry-making of the day before; when he woke he sat on a bench in a corner and began sharpening a new Turkish sabre for which he had just bartered something; and Katerina set to work embroidering a silken towel with gold thread.

All at once Katerina's father came in, angry and frowning, with a foreign pipe in his teeth; he went up to his daughter and began questioning her sternly, asking what was the reason she had come home so late the night before.

"It is not her, but me you should question about that, father-in-law! Not the wife but the husband is responsible. That's our way here, don't put yourself out about it," said Danilo, going on with his work, "perhaps in infidel lands it is not so—I don't know."

The colour came into the father-in-law's face, there was a wild gleam in his eye. "Who, if not a father should watch over his daughter!" he muttered to himself. "Well, I ask you: where were you gadding till late at night?"

"Ah, that's it at last, dear father-in-law! To that I will answer that I have left swaddling-clothes behind me long ago. I can ride a horse, I can wield a sharp

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trappings came to me; I let nothing go but his soul. Well, land here! Here, we are home, Ivan, but still you cry! Take him, Katerina . . . !"

They all got out. A thatched roof came into sight behind the mountain: it was Danilo's ancestral home. Beyond it was another mountain, and then the open plain, and there you might travel a hundred miles and not see a single Cossack.

III

Danilo's house lay between two mountains in a narrow valley that ran down to the Dnieper. It was a low-pitched house like a humble Cossack's hut and there was only one large room in it; but he and his wife and their old serving-woman and a dozen picked lads all had their places in it. There were oak shelves running round the walls at the top. Bowls and cooking-pots were piled upon them. Among them were silver goblets and drinking-cups mounted in gold, gifts or booty brought from the war. Lower down hung costly swords, muskets, arquebusses, spears; willingly or unwillingly, they had come from the Tatars, the Turks and the Poles, and many a dent there was in them. Looking at them, Danilo was reminded as by tokens of his encounters. At the bottom of the wall were smooth-planed oak benches; beside them, in front of the oven-step, the cradle hung on cords from a ring fixed in the ceiling. The whole floor of the room was beaten hard and plastered with clay. On the benches slept Danilo and his wife; on the oven-step the old serving-woman; the child played and was lulled to sleep in the cradle; and on the floor the serving-men slept in a row. But

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sword, and there are other things I can do. . . . I can refuse to answer to any one for what I do."

"I know, I see, Danilo, you seek a quarrel! A man who is not open has some evil in his mind."

"You may think as you please," said Danilo, "and I will think as I please. Thank God, I've had no part in any dishonourable deed so far; I have always stood for the orthodox faith and my fatherland, not like some vagrants who go tramping God knows whither while good Christians are fighting to the death, and afterwards come back to reap the harvest they have not sown. They are worse than the Uniats: they never look into the church of God. It is such men that should be strictly questioned where they have been gadding."

"Hey, Cossack! do you know. . . . I am no great shot; my bullet pierces the heart at seven hundred feet; I am nought to boast of at sword-play either: my man is left in bits smaller than the grains you use for porridge."

"I am ready," said Danilo jauntily, making the sign of the cross in the air with the sabre, as though he knew what he had sharpened it for.

"Danilo!" Katerina cried aloud, seizing him by the arm and hanging on it, "think what you are doing, madman, see against whom you are lifting your hand! Father, your hair is white as snow, but you have flown into a rage like a senseless lad!"

"Wife!" Danilo cried menacingly, "you know I don't like that; you mind your woman's business!"

There was a terrible clatter of swords; steel hacked steel and the Cossacks sent sparks flying like dust. Katerina went out weeping into a room apart, flung herself on the bed and covered her ears that she might

not hear the clash of the swords. But the Cossacks did not fight so faint-heartedly that she could smother the sound of their blows. Her heart was ready to break; she seemed to hear all over her the clank of the swords. "No, I cannot bear it, I cannot bear it. . . . Perhaps the crimson blood is already flowing out of the white body; maybe by now my dear one is helpless and I am lying here!" And pale all over, scarcely breathing, she went back.

A terrible and even fight it was; neither of the Cossacks was winning the day. At one moment Katerina's father attacked and Danilo seemed to give way; then Danilo attacked and the sullen father seemed to yield, and again they were equal. They boiled with rage, they swung their swords. . . . Ough! The swords clashed . . . and with a clatter the blades flew out of the handles.

"Thank God!" said Katerina, but she screamed again when she saw that the Cossacks had picked up their muskets. They put in the flints and drew the triggers.

Danilo fired and missed. Her father took aim. . . . He was old, he did not see so well as the younger man, but his hand did not tremble. A shot rang out. . . . Danilo staggered; the crimson blood stained the left sleeve of his Cossack tunic.

"No!" he cried, "I will not yield so easily. Not the left but the right hand is ataman. I have a Turkish pistol hanging on the wall: never yet has it failed me. Come down from the wall, old comrade! Do your friend a service!" Danilo stretched out his hand.

"Danilo!" cried Katerina in despair, clutching his hands and falling at his feet. "Not for myself I beseech you. There is but one end for me: unworthy is

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the wife who will outlive her husband: Dnieper, the cold Dnieper will be my grave. . . . But look at your son, Danilo, look at your son! Who will cherish the poor child? Who will be kind to him? Who will teach him to race on the raven steed, to fight for faith and freedom, to drink and carouse like a Cossack? You must perish, my son, you must perish! Your father will not think of you! See how he turns away his head. Oh, I know you now! You are a wild beast and not a man! You have the heart of a wolf and the mind of a crafty reptile! I thought there was a drop of pity in you, that there was human feeling in your breast of stone. Terribly have I been deceived! This will be a delight to you. Your bones will dance in the grave with joy when they hear the foul brutes of Poles throwing your son into the flames, when your son shrieks under the knife or the scalding water. Oh, I know you! You would be glad to rise up from the grave and fan the flames under him with your cap!"

"Stay, Katerina! Come, my precious Ivan, let me kiss you! No, my child, no one shall touch a hair of your head. You shall grow up to the glory of your fatherland; like a whirlwind you shall fly at the head of the Cossacks with a velvet cap on your head and a sharp sword in your hand. Give me your hand, father! Let us forget what has been between us! For what wrong I have done you I ask pardon. Why do you not give me your hand?" said Danilo to Katerina's father, who stood without moving, with no sign of anger nor of reconciliation on his face.

"Father!" cried Katerina, embracing and kissing him, "don't be merciless, forgive Danilo: he will never offend you again!"

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"For your sake only, my daughter, I forgive him!" he answered, kissing her with a strange glitter in his eyes.

Katerina shuddered faintly: the kiss and the strange glitter seemed uncanny to her. She leaned her elbows on the table, at which Danilo was bandaging his wounded hand, while he mused that he had acted ill and unlike a Cossack in asking pardon when he had done no wrong.

IV

The day broke, but without sunshine: the sky was overcast and a fine rain was falling on the plains, on the forest and on the broad Dnieper. Katerina woke up, but not joyfully: her eyes were tear-stained, and she was restless and uneasy.

"My dear husband, my precious husband! I have had a strange dream!"

"What dream, my sweet wife Katerina?"

"I had a strange dream, and as vivid as though it were real, that my father was that very monster whom we saw at the Esaul's. But I entreat you, do not put faith in the dream: one dreams all manner of foolishness. I dreamed that I was standing before him, was trembling and frightened and all my veins moaned at every word he said. If only you had heard what he said . . ."

"What did he say, my golden Katerina?"

"He said: 'Look at me, Katerina, how handsome I am! People are wrong in saying I am ugly. I should make you a splendid husband. See what a look there is in my eyes!' Then he turned his eyes full of fire upon me, I cried out and woke up. . . ."

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"Yes, dreams tell many a true thing. But do you know that all is not quiet beyond the mountain? I fancy the Poles have begun to show themselves again. Gorobets sent me a message to keep awake; but he need not have troubled—I am not asleep as it is. My lads have piled up a dozen barricades during the night. The common soldiers we will regale with leaden plums and the gentry shall dance to the whips."

"And father, does he know of this?"

"Your father is a burden on my back! I cannot make him out. He has committed many sins in foreign parts, I'll be bound. What other reason can there be? Here he has lived with us more than a month and not once has he made merry like a true Cossack! He would not drink mead! Do you hear, Katerina, he would not drink the mead which I wrung out of the Jews at Brest. Hey, lad!" cried Danilo, "run to the cellar, boy, and bring me the Jews' mead! He won't even drink vodka! What do you make of that? I verily believe, my lady Katerina, that he does not believe in Christ. Eh, what do you think?"

"God knows what you are saying, my lord Danilo!"

"Strange, wife!" Danilo went on, taking the earthenware mug from the Cossack, "even the unclean Catholics have a weakness for vodka; it is only the Turks who do not drink. Well, Stetsko, have you had a good sip of mead in the cellar?"

"I just tried it, master."

"You are lying, you son of a dog! See how the flies have settled on your moustache! I can see from your eyes that you have gulped down half a pailful. Oh, you Cossacks! What reckless fellows! Ready to give all else to a comrade, but he keeps his drink to himself."

It is a long time, my lady Katerina, since I have been drunk. Eh?"

"A long time indeed! Why, last . . ."

"Don't be afraid, don't be afraid, I won't drink more than a mugful! And here is the Turkish abbot at the door!" he muttered through his teeth, seeing his father-in-law stooping to come in.

"What's this, my daughter!" said the father, taking his cap off his head and setting straight his girdle where hung a sabre set with precious stones, "the sun is already high and your dinner is not ready."

"Dinner is ready, my lord and father, we will serve it at once! Bring out the pot of dumplings!" said the young mistress to the old serving-woman who was wiping the wooden bowls. "Stay, I had better get it out myself, while you call the men."

They all sat down on the floor in a ring; facing the ikons sat the father, on his left Danilo, on his right Katerina, and ten of the trustiest servants in blue and yellow tunics.

"I don't like these dumplings!" said the father, laying down his spoon after eating a little, "there is no flavour in them!"

"I know you like Jewish noodles better," thought Danilo. "Why do you say there is no flavour in the dumplings, father-in-law? Are they badly made or what? My Katerina makes dumplings such as the Hetman does not often taste. And there is no need to despise them: it is a Christian food! All holy people and godly saints have eaten dumplings!"

Not a word from the father; Danilo, too, said no more.

They served roast boar with cabbage and plums.

"I don't like pork," said Katerina's father, picking out a spoonful of cabbage.

"Why don't you like pork?" said Danilo, "it is only Turks and Jews who won't eat pork."

The father frowned more angrily than ever.

He ate nothing but some baked flour-pudding with milk over it, and instead of vodka drank some black liquid from a bottle he took out of his bosom.

After dinner Danilo slept like a hero and only woke towards evening. He sat down to write to the Cossack troops, while his young wife sat on the oven-step, rocking the cradle with her foot. The lord Danilo sat there, his left eye on his writing while his right eye looked out of the window. From the window far away he could see the shining mountains and the Dnieper; beyond the Dnieper lay the dark-blue forest; overhead glimmered the clear night-sky. But the lord Danilo was not gazing at the far-away sky and the blue forest; he was watching the projecting tongue of land on which stood the old castle. He fancied that a light gleamed at a narrow little window in the castle. But everything was still; it must have been his fancy. All he could hear was from three sides the hollow murmur of the Dnieper down below and the resounding splash of the waves for a moment awakening one after the other. It was not in a turmoil; like an old man, it muttered and grumbled and found nothing to its taste. Everything has changed about it; it keeps up a feud with the mountains, wood and meadows on its banks and carries its complaints against them to the Black Sea.

And now on the wide expanse of the Dnieper he descried the black speck of a boat, and again there was a

gleam of light in the castle. Danilo gave a low whistle and the faithful serving-man ran in at the sound.

"Make haste, Stetsko, bring with you a sharp sword and a musket, and follow me!"

"Are you going out?" asked Katerina.

"I am, wife. I must look everywhere and see that all is in order."

"But I am fearful to be left alone. I am weighed down with sleep: what if I should have the same dream again? And, indeed, I am not sure it was a dream—it was all so living."

"The old woman will stay with you, and there are Cossacks sleeping in the porch and in the courtyard."

"The old woman is asleep already, and somehow I put no trust in the Cossacks. Listen, my lord Danilo; lock me in the room and take the key with you. Then I shall not be so fearful; and let the Cossacks lie before the door."

"So be it!" said Danilo, wiping the dust off his musket and loading it with powder.

The faithful Stetsko stood already equipped with all the Cossack's accoutrements. Danilo put on his astrakhan cap, closed the window, bolted and locked the door, and, stepping between his sleeping Cossacks, went out from the courtyard towards the mountains.

The sky was almost completely clear again. A fresh breeze blew lightly from the Dnieper. But for the wail of a gull in the distance all was silent. But a faint rustle stirred. . . . Burulbash and his faithful servant stealthily hid behind the brambles that screened a barricade of felled trunks. Some one in a red tunic, with two pistols, and a sword at his side came down

the mountain-side. "Tis my father-in-law," said Danilo, scanning him from behind the bushes. "Whither goes he at this hour, and with what design? Mind, Stetsko, keep a sharp watch which road your mistress's father takes."

The man in the red tunic went down to the river-bank and turned towards the jutting tongue of land.

"Ah, so that is where he is going," said Danilo. "Why, Stetsko, hasn't he gone to the wizard's den?"

"Nowhere else, for certain, my lord Danilo! Or we should have seen him on the other side; but he disappeared near the castle."

"Wait a minute, let us get out, and follow his track. There is some secret in this. Yes, Katerina, I told you your father was an evil man; he did nothing like a good Christian."

Danilo and his faithful servant leaped out on the headland. Soon they were out of sight; the slumbering forest around the castle hid them. A gleam of light came into an upper window; the Cossacks stood below wondering how to climb to it; no gate nor door was to be seen; doubtless there was a door in the courtyard, but how could they climb in? They could hear in the distance the clanking of chains and the stirring of dogs.

"Why am I wasting time?" said Danilo, seeing a big oak tree by the window. "Stay here, lad! I will climb up the oak; from it I can look straight into the window."

With this he took off his girdle, put down his sword that it might not jingle, and gripping the branches lifted himself up. There was still a light at the window. Sitting on a branch close to the window, he held on to the tree and looked in: it was light in the room but

there was no candle. On the wall were mysterious symbols; weapons were hanging there, but all were strange—not such as are worn by Turks or Tatars or Poles or Christians or the noble Swedish people. Bats flitted to and fro under the ceiling and their shadows flitted to and fro over the floor, the doors and the walls. Then the door noiselessly opened. Some one in a red tunic walked in and went straight up to the table, which was covered with a white cloth. "It is he, it is my father-in-law!" Danilo crept a little lower down and huddled closer to the tree.

But his father-in-law had no time to look whether any one were peeping in at the window. He came in, morose and ill-humoured; he drew the cloth off the table, and at once the room was filled with transparent blue light; but the waves of pale golden light with which the room had been filled, eddied and dived, as in a blue sea, without mingling with it, and ran through it in streaks like the lines in marble. Then he set a pot upon the table and began scattering some herbs in it.

Danilo looked more attentively and saw that he was no longer wearing the red tunic; and that now he had on full trousers, such as Turks wear, with pistols in his girdle and on his head a queer cap embroidered all over with letters that were neither Russian nor Polish. As he looked at his face the face began to change; his nose grew longer and hung right down over his lips; in one instant his mouth stretched to his ears; a crooked tooth stood out beyond his lips; and he saw before him the same wizard who had appeared at the Esaul's wedding feast. "Your dream told truth, Katerina!" thought Burulbash.

The wizard began pacing round the table; the sym-

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bols on the wall began changing more rapidly, the bats flitted more swiftly up and down and to and fro. The blue light grew dimmer and dimmer and at last seemed to fade away. And now there was only a dim pinkish light in the room. With a faint ringing sound this marvellous light seemed to flood every corner, and suddenly it vanished and all was darkness. Nothing was heard but a murmur like the wind in the quiet evening hour when hovering over the mirrorlike water it bows the silvery willows lower into its depths. And it seemed to Danilo as though the moon were shining in the room, the stars were moving, there were vague glimpses of the bright blue sky within it, and he even felt the chill of night coming from it. And Danilo fancied (he began fingering his moustaches to make sure he was not dreaming) that it was no longer the sky but his own hut he was seeing through the window; his Tatar and Turkish swords were hanging on the walls; round the walls were the shelves with pots and pans; on the table stood bread and salt; the cradle hung from the ceiling . . . but terrible faces looked out where the ikons should have been; on the oven-step . . . but a thick mist hid all and it was dark again. And with a wonderful sound the rosy light flooded the room again, and again the wizard stood motionless in his strange tuban. The sounds grew louder and deeper, the delicate rosy light shone more brilliant and something white like a cloud hovered in the middle of the room; and it seemed to lord Danilo that the cloud was not a cloud, that a woman was standing there; but what was she made of? Of air, surely? Why did she stand not touching the floor, not leaning on anything, why did the

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rosy light and the magic symbols on the wall show through her? And now she moved her transparent head; a soft light shone in her pale blue eyes; her hair curled and fell over her shoulders like a pale grey mist; a faint flush coloured her lips like the scarcely perceptible crimson glimmer of dawn glowing through the white transparent sky of morning; the brows darkened a little. . . . Ah, it was Katerina! Danilo felt his limbs turned to stone; he tried to speak, but his lips moved without uttering a sound.

The wizard stood without moving. "Where have you been?" he asked, and the figure standing before him trembled.

"Oh, why did you call me up?" she moaned softly. "I was so happy. I was in the place where I was born and lived for fifteen years. Ah, how good it was there! How green and fragrant was the meadow where I used to play in childhood! The darling wild flowers were the same as ever, and our hut and the garden! Oh, how my dear mother embraced me! How much love there was in her eyes! She caressed me, she kissed my lips and my cheeks, combed out my fair hair with a fine comb. . . . Father!" Then she bent her pale eyes on the wizard. "Why did you slay my mother?"

The wizard shook his finger at her menacingly. "Did I ask you to speak of that?" And the ethereal beauty trembled. "Where is your mistress now?"

"My mistress Katerina has fallen asleep and I was glad of it; I flew up and darted off. For long years I have longed to see my mother. I am suddenly fifteen again, I feel light as a bird. Why have you sent for me?"

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"You remember all I said to you yesterday?" the wizard said, so softly that it was hard to catch the words.

"I remember, I remember! But what would I not give to forget them. Poor Katerina, there is much she knows not that her spirit knows!"

"It is Katerina's spirit," thought Danilo, but still he dared not stir.

"Repent, father! Is it not dreadful that after every murder you commit the dead rise up from their graves?"

"You are at your old tune again!" said the wizard menacingly. "I will have my way, I will make you do as I will, Katerina shall love me. . . ."

"Oh, you are a monster and not my father!" she moaned. "No, your will shall not be done! It is true that by your foul spells you have power to call up and torture her spirit; but only God can make her do what He wills. No, never shall Katerina, so long as I am living in her body, bring herself to so ungodly a deed. Father, a terrible judgment is at hand! Even if you were not my father, you would never make me false to my faithful and beloved husband. Even if my husband were not true and dear to me, I would not betray him, for God loves not souls that are faithless and false to their vows."

Then she fixed her pale eyes on the window under which Danilo was sitting and stood stock-still. . . .

"What are you looking at? Whom do you see there . . . ?" cried the wizard.

The wraith of Katerina trembled. But already Danilo was on the ground and with his faithful Stetsko making his way to his mountain home. "Terrible, ter-

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rible!" he murmured to himself, feeling a thrill of fear in his Cossack heart, and he rapidly crossed his courtyard, in which the Cossacks slept as soundly as ever, all but one who sat on guard smoking a pipe.

The sky was all spangled with stars.

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"How glad I am you have awakened me!" said Katerina, wiping her eyes with the embroidered sleeve of her smock and looking her husband up and down as he stood facing her. "What a terrible dream I have had! I could hardly breathe! Ough . . . ! I thought I was dying. . . ."

"What was your dream? Was it like this?" And Burulbash told his wife all that he had seen.

"How did you know it, husband?" asked Katerina in amazement. "But no, many things you tell me I did not know. No, I did not dream that my father murdered my mother; I did not dream of the dead. No, Danilo, you have not told the dream right. Oh, what a fearful man my father is!"

"And it is no wonder that you have not dreamed of that. You do not know a tenth part of what your spirit knows. Do you know your father is the Antichrist? Only last year when I was getting ready to go with the Poles against the Crimean Tatars (I was still allied with that faithless people then), the Father Superior of the Bratsky Monastery (he is a holy man, wife) told me that the Antichrist has the power to call up every man's spirit; for the spirit wanders at its own will when the body is asleep and flies with the arch-angels about the dwelling of God. I disliked your

father's face from the first. I would not have married you had I known you had such a father; I would have given you up and not have taken upon myself the sin of being allied to the brood of Antichrist."

"Danilo!" cried Katerina, hiding her face in her hands and bursting into tears. "In what have I been to blame? Have I been false to you, my beloved husband? How have I roused your wrath? Have I not served you truly? Do I say a word to cross you when you come back merry from a drinking bout? Have I not borne you a black-browed son?"

"Do not weep, Katerina; now I know you and nothing would make me abandon you. The sin all lies at your father's door."

"No, do not call him my father! He is not my father. God is my witness I disown him, I disown my father! He is Antichrist, a rebel against God! If he were perishing, if he were drowning, I would not hold out a hand to save him; if his throat were parched by some magic herb I would not give him a drop of water. You are my father!"

VI

In a deep underground cellar at lord Danilo's the wizard lay bound in iron chains and locked in with three locks; while his devilish castle above the Dnieper was on fire and the waves, glowing red as blood, splashed and surged round the ancestral walls. It was not for sorcery, it was not for ungodly deeds that the wizard lay in the underground cellar—for his wickedness God was his judge; it was for secret treachery that he was imprisoned, for plotting with the foes of Ortho-

dox Russia to sell to the Catholics the Ukrainian people and burn Christian churches. The wizard was gloomy; thoughts black as night strayed through his mind; he had but one day left to live and on the morrow he would take leave of the world; his punishment was awaiting him on the morrow. It was no light one: it would be an act of mercy if he were boiled alive in a cauldron or his sinful skin were flayed from him. The wizard was melancholy, his head was bowed. Perhaps he was already repenting on the eve of death; but his sins were not such as God would forgive. Above him was a little window covered with an iron grating. Clanking his chains he stood to look out of the window and see whether his daughter were passing. She was gentle and forgiving as a dove; would she not have mercy on her father . . . ? But there was no one. The road ran below the window, no one passed along it. Beneath it rippled the Dnieper, it cared for no one; it murmured, and its monotonous splash sounded dreary to the captive.

Then some one appeared upon the road—it was a Cossack! And the prisoner heaved a deep sigh. Again it was empty. Yonder some one was coming down the hill . . . a green overskirt flapped in the wind . . . a golden head-dress glittered on her head. . . . It was she! He pressed still closer to the window. Now she was coming nearer. . . .

"Katerina, daughter! Have pity on me, be merciful!"

She was dumb, she would not listen, she did not turn her eyes towards the prison, and had already passed, already vanished. The whole world was empty; dimly the Dnieper murmured; it lays a load of sadness

on the heart; but did the wizard know aught of such sadness?

The day was drawing to a close. Now the sun was setting; now it had vanished. Now it was evening, it was cool; an ox was lowing somewhere; sounds of voices floated from afar; people doubtless going home from their work and making merry; a boat flashed into sight on the Dnieper . . . no one thought of the prisoner. A silver crescent gleamed in the sky; now some one came along the road in the opposite direction; it was hard to tell the figure in the darkness; it was Katerina coming back.

"Daughter, for Christ's sake! even the savage wolf-whelps will not tear their mother in pieces—daughter, give one look at least to your guilty father!"

She heeded not but walked on.

"Daughter, for the sake of your unhappy mother . . ."

She stopped.

"Come close and hear my last words!"

"Why do you call me, enemy of God? Do not call me daughter! There is no kinship between us. What do you want of me for the sake of my unhappy mother?"

"Katerina, my end is nigh; I know that your husband means to tie me to the tail of a wild mare and send it racing in the open country, and maybe he will invent an end more dreadful yet . . ."

"But is there in the world a punishment bad enough for your sins? You may be sure no one will plead for you."

"Katerina! It is not punishment in this world that I fear but in the next. . . . You are innocent, Kate-

rina; your soul will fly about God in paradise; but your ungodly father's soul will burn in a fire everlasting and never will that fire be quenched; it will burn more and more hotly; no drop of dew will fall upon it, nor will the wind breathe on it. . . ."

"I can do nought to ease that punishment," said Katerina, turning away.

"Katerina, stay for one word! You can save my soul! You know not yet how good and merciful is God. Have you heard of the Apostle Paul, what a sinful man he was—but afterwards he repented and became a saint?"

"What can I do to save your soul?" said Katerina. "It is not for a weak woman like me to think of that."

"If I could but get out, I would abandon everything. I will repent, I will go into a cave, I will wear a hair shirt next my skin and will spend day and night in prayer. I will give up not only meat, but even fish I will not taste! I will lay nothing under me when I lie down to sleep! And I will pray without ceasing, pray without ceasing! And if God's mercy does not release me from at least a hundredth part of my sins, I will bury myself up to the neck in the earth or build myself up in a wall of stone; I will take neither food nor drink and perish; and I will give all my goods to the monks that they may sing a requiem for me for forty days and forty nights."

Katerina pondered. "If I were to unlock you I could not undo your fetters."

"I do not fear chains," he said. "You say that they have fettered my hands and feet? No, I threw a mist over their eyes and held out a dry tree instead of hands. Here, see: I have not a chain upon me now!" he said,

walking into the middle of the cellar. "I should not fear these walls either and should pass them; but your husband does not know what walls these are: they were built by a holy hermit, and no evil power can deliver a prisoner from them without the very key with which the hermit used to lock his cell. Just such a cell will I build for myself, incredible sinner as I have been, when I am free again."

"Listen, I will let you out; but what if you deceive me?" said Katerina, standing still at the door, "and instead of repenting, again become the devil's comrade?"

"No, Katerina, I have not long left to live; my end is near even if I am not put to death. Can you believe that I will give myself up to eternal punishment?"

The key grated in the lock.

"Farewell! God in His mercy keep you, my child!" said the wizard, kissing her.

"Do not touch me, you fearful sinner; make haste and go . . ." said Katerina.

But he was gone.

"I let him out!" she said to herself, terror-stricken, looking wildly at the walls. "What answer shall I give my husband now? I am undone. There is nothing left but to bury myself alive!" and sobbing she almost fell upon the block on which the prisoner had been sitting. "But I have saved a soul," she said softly. "I have done a godly deed; but my husband . . . I have deceived him for the first time. Oh, how terrible, how hard it will be for me to lie to him! Some one is coming! It is he! my husband!" she uttered a desperate shriek and fell senseless on the ground.

"It is I, my daughter! It is I, my darling!" Katerina heard, as she revived and saw the old serving-woman before her. The woman bent down and seemed to whisper to her, and stretching out her withered old hand sprinkled her with water.

"Where am I?" said Katerina, sitting up and looking round her. "The Dnieper is splashing before me, behind me are the mountains. . . . Where have you taken me, granny?"

"I have taken you out; I have carried you in my arms from the stifling cellar; I locked up the cellar again that you might not be in trouble with my lord Danilo."

"Where is the key?" asked Katerina, looking at her girdle. "I don't see it."

"Your husband has taken it, to have a look at the wizard, my child."

"To look! Granny, I am lost!" cried Katerina.

"God mercifully preserve us from that, my child! Only hold your peace, my little lady, no one will know anything."

"He has escaped, the cursed Antichrist! Do you hear, Katerina, he has escaped!" said Danilo, coming up to his wife. His eyes flashed fire; his sword hung clanking at his side. His wife was like one dead.

"Has some one let him out, dear husband?" she brought out trembling.

"Yes, some one has—you are right: the devil. Look, where he was is a log covered with chains. It is God's pleasure, it seems, that the devil should not fear a Cos-

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sack's hands! If any one of my Cossacks had dreamed of such a thing and I knew of it . . . I could find no punishment bad enough for him!"

"And if it had been I?" Katerina could not resist saying, and she stopped, panic-stricken.

"If you had done it you would be no wife to me. I would sew you up in a sack and drown you in mid-Dnieper . . . !"

Katerina could hardly breathe and she felt the hair stand up on her head.

VIII

On the frontier road the Poles had gathered at a tavern and feasted there for two days. There were not a few of the rabble. They had doubtless met for some part; some had muskets, there was jingling of spurs and clinking of swords. The nobles made merry and boasted they talked of their marvellous deeds; they mocked at the Orthodox Christians, calling the Ukrainian people their serfs, and insolently twisted their mustaches and sprawled on the benches. There was a priest among them too, but he was like themselves and had not even the semblance of a Christian priest: he drank and caroused with them and uttered shameful words with his unclean tongue. The servants were no better than their masters, tucking up the sleeves of their tattered tunics, they walked about with a swagger as though they were of consequence. They played cards, struck each other on the nose with cards, they had brought with them other men's wives, there was shouting and quarrelling. Their masters were at the height of their revelry, playing all sorts of tricks, pull-

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ing the Jewish tavern-keeper by the beard, painting a cross on his impious brow, shooting blank charges at the women and dancing the Cracovienne with their impious priest. Such sinfulness had never been seen on Russian soil even among the Tatars; it was God's chastisement, seemingly, for the sins of Russia that she should be put to so great a shame! In the midst of the bedlam, talk could be heard of lord Danilo's homestead above the Dnieper, of his lovely wife. . . . The gang of thieves was plotting foul deeds!

IX

The lord Danilo sat at the table in his house leaning on his elbow, thinking. The lady Katerina sat on the oven-step, singing.

"I am sad, my wife!" said lord Danilo. "My head aches and my heart aches. I feel weighed down. It seems my death is hovering not far away."

"Oh, my precious husband! lean your head upon me! Why do you cherish such black thoughts?" thought Katerina, but dared not utter the words. It was bitter to her, feeling her guilt, to receive her husband's caresses.

"Listen, wife!" said Danilo, "do not desert our son when I am no more. God will give you no happiness either in this world or the next if you forsake him. Sad it will be for my bones to rot in the damp earth, sadder still it will be for my soul!"

"What are you saying, my husband? Was it not you who mocked at us weak women? And now you are talking like a weak woman yourself. You must live long years yet."

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"No, Katerina, my heart feels death near at hand. The world grows a sad place; cruel days are coming. Ah, I remember, I remember the years—they will not return for sure! He was living then, the honour and glory of our army, old Konashevitch! The Cossack regiments pass before my eyes as though it were to-day. Those were golden days, Katerina! The old Hetman sat on a raven steed; his mace shone in his hand; the soldiers stood around him, and on each side moved the red sea of the Zaporozhtsy. The Hetman began to speak—and all stood as though turned to stone. The old man wept when he told us of old days and battles long ago. Ah, Katerina, if only you knew how we fought in those days with the Turks! The scar on my head shows even now. Four bullets pierced me in four places and not one of the wounds has quite healed. How much gold we took in those days! The Cossacks filled their caps with precious stones. What horses, Katerina! if you only knew, what horses, Katerina, we drove away with us! Ah, I shall never fight like that! One would think I am not old and I am strong in body, yet the sword drops out of my hand, I live doing nothing and know not what I live for. There is no order in the Ukraine: the colonels and the esauls quarrel like dogs: there is no chief over them all. Our gentry have changed everything after the Polish style, they have copied their sly ways . . . they have sold their souls, accepting the Uniat faith. The Jews are oppressing the poor. Oh, those days, those days! those days that are past! Whither have you fled, my years? Go to the cellar, boy, and bring me a jug of mead! I will drink to the life of the past and to the years that have gone!"

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"How shall we receive our guests, lord Danilo? The Poles are coming from the side of the meadow," said Stetsko, coming into the hut.

"I know what they are coming for," said Danilo. "Saddle the horses, my faithful men! Put on your harness! Bare your swords! Don't forget to take your rations of lead: we must do honour to our guests!"

But before the Cossacks had time to saddle their horses and load their guns, the Poles covered the mountain-side as leaves cover the ground in autumn.

"Ah, here we have foes to try our strength with!" said Danilo, looking at the stout Poles swaying majestically on their gold-harnessed steeds in the front ranks. "It seems it is my lot to have one more glorious jaunt! Take your pleasure, Cossack soul, for the last time! Go ahead, lads, our festival has come!"

And the festival was kept on the mountains and great was the merry-making: swords were playing, bullets flying, horses neighing and stamping. The shouting dazed the brain; the smoke blinded the eye. All was confusion, but the Cossack felt where was friend, where was foe; whenever a bullet whistled a gallant rider dropped from the saddle, whenever a sword flashed—a head fell to the ground, muttering wild words.

But the red crest of lord Danilo's Cossack cap could always be seen in the crowd; the gold girdle of his dark blue tunic gleamed bright, the mane on his raven steed fluttered in the breeze. Like a bird he flew hither and thither, shouting and waving his Damascus sword and hacking to right and to left. Hack away, Cossack, make merry! Comfort your gallant heart; but look not at the gold trappings and tunics; trample under foot the gold and jewels! Stab, Cossack! Wreak your

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will, Cossack! But look back: already the godless Poles are setting fire to the huts and driving away the frightened cattle. And like a whirlwind Danilo turned round, and the cap with the red crest gleamed now by the huts while the crowd about him scattered.

Hour after hour the Poles fought with the Cossacks; there were not many left of either; but lord Danilo did not slacken; with his long spear he thrust Poles from the saddle and his spirited steed trampled them under foot. Already his yard was almost cleared, already the Poles were flying in all directions; already the Cossacks were stripping the golden tunics and rich trappings from the slain; already lord Danilo was setting off in pursuit, when he looked round to call his men together . . . and was overwhelmed with fury: he saw Katerina's father. There he stood on the hillside aiming his musket at him. Danilo urged his horse straight upon him. . . . Cossack, you go to your ruin! Then came the crack of a shot—and the wizard vanished behind the hill. Only the faithful Stetsko caught a glimpse of the red tunic and the strange hat. The Cossack staggered and fell to the ground. The faithful Stetsko flew to his master's aid: his lord lay stretched on the ground with his bright eyes closed while the crimson blood spurted from his breast. But he was aware of his faithful servant's presence; slowly he raised his eyelids and his eyes gleamed: "Farewell, Stetsko! Tell Katerina not to forsake her son! And do not you, my faithful servants, forsake him either!" and he ceased. His gallant soul flew from his noble body; his lips turned blue; the Cossack slept, never to wake again.

His faithful servant sobbed and beckoned to Katerina: "Come, lady, come! deeply has your lord been

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carousing; in drunken sleep he lies on the damp earth; and long will it be ere he awakens!"

Katerina wrung her hand and fell like a sheaf of corn on the dead body: "Husband, is it you lying here with closed eyes? Rise up, my peerless falcon, stretch out your hand! Stand up! Look, if only once, at your Katerina, move your lips, utter one word . . . ! But you are mute, you are mute, my noble lord! You have turned blue as the Black Sea. Your heart is not beating! Why are you so cold, my lord? It seems my tears are not scalding, they have no power to warm you! It seems my weeping is not loud, it will not waken you! Who will lead your regiments now? Who will gallop on your raven steed, loudly calling, and lead the Cossacks, waving your sword? Cossacks, Cossacks, where is your honour and glory? Your honour and glory is lying with closed eyes on the damp earth. Bury me, bury me with him! Throw earth upon my eyes! Press the maple boards upon my white bosom! My beauty is useless to me now!"

Katerina grieved and wept; while the distant horizon was covered with dust: the old Esaul Gorobets was galloping to the rescue.

x

Lovely is the Dnieper in still weather when, freely and smoothly, its waters glide through forests and mountains. Not a sound, not a ripple is stirring. You look and cannot tell whether its majestic expanse moves or moves not; and it might be of molten crystal and like a blue road made of looking-glass, immeasurably broad, endlessly long, twining and twisting about the green

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world. Sweet it is then for the burning sun to peep at itself from the heights and to plunge its beams in the cool of its glassy waves, and for the forests on the banks to watch their bright reflections in the water. Wreathed in green, they press with the wild flowers close to the river's edge, and bending over look in and are never tired of gazing and admiring their bright reflection, and smile and greet it with nodding branches. In mid-Dnieper they dare not look: none but the sun and the blue sky gaze into it; rarely a bird flies to the middle of the river. Glorious it is! No river like it in the world! Lovely too is the Dnieper on a warm summer night when all are sleeping—man, beast and bird, while God alone majestically surveys earth and heaven and majestically shakes His garment. The stars are scattered from His garment: they glow and shine above the world and all are reflected together in the Dnieper. All of them the Dnieper holds in its dark bosom; not one escapes it till quenched in the sky. The black forests dotted with sleeping crows and the mountains cleft asunder in ages past strive hanging over, to conceal the river in their long shadows, but in vain! There is nought in the world could hide the Dnieper. Deep, deep blue it flows, spreading its waters far and wide at midnight as at midday: it is seen far, far away, as far as the eye of man can see. Shrinking from the cold of night and huddling closer to the bank, it leaves behind a silver trail gleaming like the blade of a Damascus sword while the deep blue water slumbers again. Lovely then too is the Dnieper, and no river is like it in the world! When dark blue storm-clouds pile in masses over the sky, the dark forest totters to its roots, the oaks creak and the lightning zigzagging through

the storm-clouds suddenly lights up the whole world—terrible then is the Dnieper! Then its mountainous billows roar flinging themselves against the hillside, and flashing and moaning rush back and wail and lament in the distance. So the old mother laments as she lets her Cossack son go to the war. Bold and reckless, he rides his raven steed, arms akimbo and jaunty cap on one side, while she, sobbing, runs after him, seizes him by the stirrup, catches the bridle and wrings her hands over him, bathed in bitter tears.

Strange and black are the burnt tree-stumps and stones on the jutting bank between the warring waves. And the landing boat is beaten against the bank, thrown upwards and flung back again. What Cossack dared row out in a boat when old Dnieper was raging? Surely he knew not that the river swallows men like flies.

The boat reached the bank, out of it stepped the wizard. He was in no happy mood: bitter to him was the funeral feast which the Cossacks had kept over their slain master. Heavily had the Poles paid for it: forty-four of them in all their harness and accoutrements and thirty-three servants were hacked to pieces, while the others were captured with their horses to be sold to the Tatars.

He went down stone steps between the burnt stumps to a place where he had a cave dug deep in the earth. He went in softly, not letting the door creak, put a pot on the table that was covered with a cloth and began with his long hands strewing into it some strange herbs; he took a ladle made of some rare wood, scooped up some water with it and poured it out, moving his lips and repeating an incantation. The cave was flooded

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with rosy light and his face was terrible to look upon: it seemed covered with blood, only the deep wrinkles showed up black upon it and his eyes were as though on fire. Foul sinner! His beard was grey, his face was lined with wrinkles, he was shrivelled with age, and still he persisted in his godless design. A white cloud began to hover in the cave and something like joy gleamed in his face; but why did he suddenly stand motionless with his mouth open, not daring to stir, why did his hair rise up on his head? The features of a strange face gleamed upon him from the cloud. Unbidden, uninvited it had come to visit him: it grew more distinct and fastened its eyes immovably upon him. The features, eyebrows, eyes, lips—all were unfamiliar; never in his life had he seen them. And there was nothing terrible, seemingly, about it, but he was overwhelmed with horror. The strange marvellous face still looked fixedly at him from the cloud. Then the cloud vanished, but the unfamiliar face was more distinct than ever and the piercing eyes were still riveted on him. The wizard turned white as a sheet; he shrieked in a wild unnatural voice and overturned the pot. . . . All was over.

XI

"Take comfort, my dear sister!" said the old Esaul Gorobets, "rarely do dreams come true!"

"Lie down, sister," said his young daughter-in-law. "I will fetch an old dame, a wise woman; no evil spirit can stand against her, she will help you."

"Fear nothing!" said his son, touching his sword, "no one shall wrong you!"

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Dully and with dim eyes Katerina looked at them all and found no word to say.

"I myself brought about my ruin: I let him out!" she said at last. "He gives me no peace! Here I have been ten days with you in Kiev and my sorrow is no less. I thought that at least I could bring up my son to avenge. . . . I dreamed of him, looking terrible! God forbid that you should ever see him like that! My heart is still throbbing. 'I will kill your child, Katerina,' he shouted, 'if you do not marry me. . . .'" And she flung herself sobbing on the cradle; and the frightened child stretched out its little hands and cried.

The Esaul's son was boiling with anger as he heard such words.

The Esaul Gorobets himself was roused. "Let him try coming here, the accursed Antichrist; he will learn whether there is still strength in the old Cossack's arm. God sees," he said, turning his keen eyes to heaven, "whether I did not hasten to give a hand to brother Danilo. It was His holy will! I found him lying on the cold bed upon which so many, many Cossacks have been laid. But what a funeral feast we had for him! We did not leave a single Pole alive! Be comforted, my child! No one shall dare to harm you, so long as I am alive or my son."

As he finished speaking the old Cossack captain approached the cradle and the child saw hanging from a strap his red pipe set in silver and the pouch with the flashing steel,¹ and stretched out its arms towards him and laughed. "He takes after his father," said the old Esaul, unfastening the pipe and giving it to the child,

¹ For striking a light on a flint is meant.—(Translator's Note.)

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"he is not out of the cradle, but he is thinking of a pipe already!"

Katerina heaved a sigh and fell to rocking the cradle. They agreed to spend the night together and soon afterwards they were all asleep; Katerina, too, dropped asleep.

All was still in the courtyard and the house; every one slept but the Cossacks who were keeping watch. Suddenly Katerina woke with a scream, and the others woke too. "He is slain, he is murdered!" she cried, and flew to the cradle. All surrounded the cradle and were numb with horror when they saw that the child in it was dead. None uttered a sound, not knowing what to think of this unheard-of crime.

XII

Far from the Ukraine, beyond Poland and the populous town of Lemberg, run ranges of high mountains. Mountain after mountain, like chains of stone flung to right and to left over the land, they fetter it with layers of rock to keep out the resounding turbulent sea. These stony chains stretch into Wallachia and the Sedmigrad-sky region and stand like a huge horseshoe between the Galician and Hungarian peoples. There are no such mountains in our country. The eye shrinks from viewing them and no human foot has climbed to their tops. They are a wonderful sight. Was it some angry sea that broke away from its wide shores in a storm and threw its monstrous waves aloft and they turned to stone and remained motionless in the air? Or did heavy storm-clouds fall from heaven and cumber up the earth? For they have the same grey colour and

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their white crests flash and sparkle in the sun.

Up to the Carpathian Mountains one may hear Russian speech, and just beyond the mountain there are still here and there echoes of our native tongue; but further beyond, faith and speech are different. The numerous Hungarian people live there; they ride, fight and drink like any Cossack, and do not grudge gold pieces from their pockets for their horses' trappings and costly tunics. There are great wide lakes among the mountains. They are still as glass and as mirrors reflect bare mountain tops and the green slopes below.

But who rides through the night on a huge raven steed whether stars shine or not? What hero of super-human stature gallops under the mountains, above the lakes, is mirrored with his gigantic horse in the still waters and throws his vast reflection on the mountains? His plated armour glitters, his sabre rattles by the saddle; his helmet is tilted forward; his moustaches are black; his eyes are closed; his eyelashes are drooping—he is asleep and drowsily holds the reins; and on the same horse sits with him a young child, and he, too, is asleep and drowsily holds on to the hero. Who is he, whither goes he, and why? Who knows. Not one day nor two has he been travelling over the mountains. Day breaks, the sun shines and he is seen no more; only from time to time the mountaineers behold a long shadow flitting over the mountains though the sky is bright and there is no cloud upon it. But as soon as night brings back the darkness, he appears again and is reflected in the lakes and his shadow follows him quivering. Already he has crossed many mountains and at last he reaches Krivan. There is no mountain in the Carpathians higher than this one; it towers like

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a monarch above the others. There the horse and his rider halted and sank into even deeper slumber and the lowering clouds hid them from view.

XIII

"Hush . . . don't knock like that, nurse: my child is asleep. My baby cried a long time, now he is asleep. I am going to the forest, nurse! But why do you look at me like this? You are terrible: there are iron pincers coming out of your eyes . . . ugh, how long they are, and they glow like fire! You must be a witch! Oh, if you are a witch, go away! You will steal my son. How absurd the Esaul is; he thinks it is gay for me to live in Kiev. No, my husband and my son are here. Who will look after the house? I went out so quietly that even the dog and the cat did not hear me. Do you want to grow young again, nurse? That's not hard at all; you have but to dance. Look, how I dance."

And uttering these incoherent sentences Katerina set to dancing, looking wildly about her and putting her arms akimbo. With a shriek she tapped with her feet, her silver heels clanked regardless of time or tune. Her black tresses floated loose about her white neck. Like a bird she flew round without resting, waving her hands and nodding her head, and it seemed as though she must either fall helpless to the ground or soar away from earth altogether.

The old nurse stood mournfully, her wrinkled face wet with tears; the trusty Cossacks had a load of sorrow on their hearts as they looked at their mistress. At last she was exhausted and languidly tapped with her feet on the same spot, fancying she was dancing a

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round. "I have a necklace, lads," she said, stopping at last, "and you have not . . . ! Where is my husband?" she cried suddenly, drawing a Turkish dagger out of her girdle. "Oh, this is not the knife I need." With that, tears of grief came into her eyes. "My father's heart is far away; it will not reach it. His heart is wrought of iron; it was forged by a witch in the furnace of hell. Why does not my father come? Does not he know that it is time to stab him? He wants me to come myself, it seems . . ." and breaking off she laughed uncannily. "A funny story came into my mind: I remembered how my husband was buried. He was buried alive, you know. . . . It did make me laugh . . . ! Listen, listen!" and instead of speaking she began to sing:

"A blood-stained chariot races on,
A Cossack lies upon it
Shot through the breast, stabbed to the heart,
In his right hand he holds an arrow
And blood is trickling from it,
A stream of blood is flowing.
A plane-tree stands over the river,
Above the tree a raven croaks.
A mother is weeping for the Cossack.
Weep not, mother, do not grieve!
For your son is married.
He chose a lady for his bride,
A mound of earth in the bare fields
Without a door or window.
And this is how my story ends.
A fish was dancing with a crab,
And may an ague take his mother,
If he will not love me!"

This was how she muddled lines from different songs together. She had been living two days already in her

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own house and would not hear of Kiev. She would not say her prayers, refused to see any one, and wandered from morning till night in the dark oak thickets. When twilight scratched her white face and shoulders; the wind stirred her loose hair, the autumn leaves rustled under her feet—she looked at nothing. At the hour when the glow of sunset dies away and before the stars come out or the moon shines, it is fearful to walk in the forest. Unhappily, infants scratch in the trees and sob at the branches, sobbing and laughing, they wander over the road and the wastes of nettles; maidens who have lost their souls rise up one after the other from the depths of the Dnieper, their green tresses stream over their shoulders, the water drips splashing from their long hair; and a maiden shines through the water as through a veil of crystal; her lips glow, her cheeks glow, her eyes bewitch as though she might burn with love, as though she might kiss one to death. Flee, Christian! do not wake her bed—the cold water; she will tickle your mouth and drag you under water. Katerina looked at no one, in her frenzy she had no fear of the dark, she wandered at night with her knife, seeking her father.

In the early morning a visitor arrived of handsome appearance in a red tunic, and inquired for the lord Danilo. He heard all the story, wiped his tear-stained cheeks with his sleeves and shrugged his shoulders. He said that he had fought side by side with Barulbash; that he told they had done battle with the Turks and that he never had he thought that the lord Danilo would meet with such an end. The visitor told them of other things and wanted to see the lady Katerina.

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At first Katerina heeded nothing of what the guest said; but afterwards she began to listen to his words as though understanding. He told her how Danilo and he had lived together like brothers; how once they had hidden under a dam from the Crimeans. . . . Katerina listened and kept her eyes fixed upon him.

"She will recover," the Cossacks thought, looking at her, "this guest will heal her! She is listening like one who understands!"

The visitor began meanwhile describing how Danilo had once in a confidential conversation said to him: "Mind, brother Kopryan, when it is God's will that I am gone, you take Katerina, take her for your wife. . . ."

Katerina looked piercingly at him: "Ah!" she shrieked, "it is he, it is my father!" and she flew at him with her knife.

For a long time he struggled trying to snatch the knife from her; at last he snatched it away, raised it to strike—and a terrible deed was done: the father killed his frantic daughter.

The astounded Cossacks dashed at him, but the wizard had already leapt upon his horse and was gone.

XIV

An unheard-of marvel appeared beyond Kiev. All the nobles and the Hetmans assembled to see the marvel: in all directions the far distance had become visible. Far off was the dark blue of the mouth of the Dnieper and beyond that the Black Sea. Men who had travelled recognised the Crimea rising mountainous out of the sea and the marshy Sivash. On the right could be seen the Galician land.

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"And what is that?" people asked the old men, pointing to white and grey crests looming far away in the sky, looking more like clouds.

"Those are the Carpathian Mountains!" said the old men, "among them are some that are for ever covered with snow, and the clouds cling to them and hover there at night."

Then a new miracle happened: the clouds vanished from the highest peak and on the top of it appeared a horseman, in full knightly accoutrements, with his eyes closed, and he was distinctly seen as though he had been standing close to them.

Then among the marvelling and fearful people, one leapt on a horse, and looking wildly about him as though to see whether he were pursued, hurriedly set his horse galloping at its utmost speed. It was the wizard. Why was he so panic-stricken? Looking in terror at the marvellous knight, he recognised the face which had appeared to him when he was working his spells. He could not have said why his whole soul was thrown into confusion at this sight, and, looking fearfully about him, he raced till he was overtaken by night and the stars began to come out. Then he turned homewards, perhaps to ask the Evil One what was meant by this marvel. He was just about to leap with his horse over a stream which lay across his path when his horse suddenly stopped in full gallop, looked round at him—and, marvellous to relate! laughed aloud! Two rows of white teeth gleamed horribly in the darkness. The wizard's hair stood up on his head. He uttered a wild scream—wept like one frantic and turned his horse straight for Kiev. He felt as though he were being pursued on all sides: the trees that sur-

rounded him in the dark forest strove to strangle him, nodding their black beards and stretching out their long branches; the stars seemed to be racing ahead of him and pointing to the sinner; the very road seemed to be flying after him.

The despairing wizard fled to the holy places in Kiev.

A holy hermit sat alone in his cave before a little lamp and did not take his eyes off the holy book. It was many years since he had first shut himself up in his cave; he had already made himself a coffin in which he lay down to sleep instead of a bed. The holy man closed his book and fell to praying. . . . Suddenly there ran in a man of a strange and terrible aspect. At first the holy hermit was astounded and stepped back seeing such a man. He was trembling all over like an aspen leaf; his eyes looked from side to side in panic, a light of terror gleamed in them; his hideous face made one shudder.

"Father, pray! pray!" he shouted desperately, "pray for a lost soul!" and he sank to the ground.

The holy hermit crossed himself, took up his book, opened it and stepped back in horror, dropping the book: "No, incredible sinner! There is no mercy for you! Avaunt! I cannot pray for you!"

"No?" the wizard cried frantically.

"Look! the letters in the holy book are dripping with blood. . . . There has never been such a great sinner in the world!"

"Father! you are mocking me!"

"Hence, accursed sinner! I am not mocking you. I

am overcome with fear. It is not good for a man to be with you!"

"No, no! You are mocking, say not so. . . . I see that your lips are smiling and the rows of your old teeth are gleaming white!"

And like one possessed he flew at the holy hermit and killed him.

A terrible moan was heard and echoed through the forest and the fields. Dry withered arms with long claws rose up from beyond the forest; they trembled and disappeared.

And now he felt no fear nor anything. All was confusion: there was a noise in his ears, a noise in his head as though he were drunk, and everything before his eyes was veiled as though by spiders' webs. Leaping on to his horse he rode straight to Kanev, thinking thence to go through Tcherkassy direct to the Crimean Tatars, though he knew not why he went. He rode one day and a second and still Kanev was not in sight. The road was the same, he ought to have reached it long before, but there was no sign of Kanev. Far away there gleamed the cupolas of churches; but that was not Kanev but Shumsk. The wizard was amazed to find that he had travelled quite the wrong way. He turned back towards Kiev, and a day later a town appeared—not Kiev but Galitch, a town further from Kiev than Shumsk and not far from Hungary. At a loss what to do he turned back, but felt again that he was going backwards as he went on. No one in the world could tell what was in the wizard's soul; and had any one seen and known, he would not have slept at night or laughed again in his life. It was not malice, not terror and not fierce anger. There is no word

in the world to say what it was. He was burning, scalding, he would have liked to trample the whole country from Kiev to Galitch with all the people and everything in it and drown it in the Black Sea. But it was not from malice he would do it: no, he knew not why he wanted it. He shuddered when he saw the Carpathian Mountains and lofty Krivan, its crest capped with a grey cloud; the horse still galloped on and now was racing among the mountains. The clouds suddenly lifted, and facing him appeared the horseman in his terrible immensity. . . . The wizard tried to halt, he tugged at the rein; the horse neighed wildly, tossed its mane and dashed towards the horseman. Then the wizard felt everything swoon within him, while the motionless horseman stirred and suddenly opened his eyes, saw the wizard flying towards him and laughed. The wild laugh echoed through the mountains like a clap of thunder and resounded in the wizard's heart, setting his whole body throbbing. He felt that some mighty being had taken possession of him and was moving within him, hammering on his heart and his veins . . . so fearfully that laugh resounded within him!

The horseman stretched out his fearful hand, seized the wizard and lifted him into the air. The wizard died instantly and he opened his eyes after his death: but he was dead and looked out of dead eyes. Neither the living nor the risen from the dead have such a terrible look in their eyes. He turned his dead eyes from side to side and saw dead men rising up from Kiev, from Galicia and the Carpathian Mountains, exactly like him.

Pale, very pale, one taller than another, one bonier

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than another, they thronged round the horseman who held this awful prey in his hand. The horseman laughed once more and dropped the wizard down a precipice. And all the corpses leapt into the precipice and fastened their teeth in the dead man's flesh. Another, taller and more terrible than all the rest, tried to rise from the ground but could not—he had not the power, he had grown so immense underground; and if he had risen out of the earth he would have overturned the Carpathians and the whole of the Sedmigradsky and the Turkish lands. He only stirred slightly, but that set the whole earth quaking, and overturned many houses and crushed many people.

And often in the Carpathians a sound is heard as though a thousand mills were churning up the water with their wheels: it is the sound of the dead men gnawing a corpse in the fatal abyss which no man has seen yet, for none dare pass it. It sometimes happens that the earth trembles from one end to another: that is said by the learned men to be due to a mountain near the sea from which flames issue and hot streams flow. But the old men who live in Hungary and Galicia know better, and say that it is the dead man who has grown so immense in the earth trying to rise that makes the earth quake.

XVI

A crowd had gathered round an old bandura-player in the town of Gluhov and had been listening for an hour to the blind man's playing. No bandura-player sang so well and such marvellous songs. First he sang of the rule of the Hetmans in the old days, of Sagaidachny and Hmelnitsky. Times were different then:

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the Cossacks were at the height of their glory, they trampled their foes underfoot and no one dared to mock at them. The old man sang merry songs too, and looked about at the crowd as though his eyes could see, and his fingers with little plates of bone fixed on them danced like flies over the strings, and it seemed that the strings themselves were playing; and the crowd, the old people looking down and the young staring at the singer, dared not even whisper together.

"Stay," said the old man, "I will sing to you of what happened long ago." The people pressed closer and the blind man sang:

"In the days of Stepan, prince of Sedmigrad (the prince of Sedmigrad was also king of the Poles), there lived two Cossacks: Ivan and Petro. They lived together like brothers: 'See here, Ivan,' said Petro, 'whatever you gain, let us go halves; when one is merry, the other is merry too; when one is sad, the other is sad too; when one wins booty, we share it; when one gets taken prisoner, the other sells everything to ransom him or else goes himself into captivity.' And, indeed, whatever the Cossacks gained they shared equally: if they drove away herds of cattle or horses—they shared them.

"King Stepan made war on the Turks. He had been fighting with the Turks three weeks and could not drive them out. And the Turks had a Pasha who with a few janissaries could slaughter a whole regiment. So King Stepan proclaimed that if a brave warrior could be found to bring him the Pasha dead or alive he would give him a reward equal to the pay of the whole army.

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"Let us go and catch the Pasha, brother," said Ivan to Petro. And the two Cossacks set off, one one way, one the other.

"Whether Petro would have been successful or not there is no telling; but Ivan led the Pasha with a lasso round his neck to the King. 'Brave fellow!' said King Stepan, and he commanded that he should be given a sum equal to the pay of the whole army, and that he should be given land wherever he chose and cattle as many as he pleased. As soon as Ivan received the reward from the King, he shared the money that very day with Petro. Petro took half of the King's money, but could not bear the thought that Ivan had been so honoured by the King, and he hid deep in his heart desire for vengeance.

"The two Cossacks were journeying to the land beyond the Carpathians that the King had granted to Ivan. Ivan had set his son on the horse behind him, tying the child to himself. The boy had fallen asleep; Ivan, too, began to doze. A Cossack should not sleep, the mountain paths are perilous . . . ! But the Cossack had a horse who knew the way; it would not stumble or step aside. There is a precipice between the mountains; no one has ever seen the bottom of it; it is deep as the sky is high. The road passed just above the precipice; two men could ride abreast on it, but for three it was too narrow. The horse began stepping cautiously with the slumbering Cossack on its back. Petro rode beside him; he trembled all over and was breathless with joy. He looked round and thrust his

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adopted brother into the precipice; and the horse with the Cossack and the baby fell into the abyss.

"But Ivan caught at a branch and only the horse dropped to the bottom. He began scrambling up with his son upon his back. He looked up when he was nearly at the top and saw that Petro was holding a lance ready to thrust him back. 'Merciful God! better I had never raised my eyes again than I should see my own brother holding a lance ready to thrust me back . . . ! Dear brother, stab me if that is my fate, but take my son: what has the innocent child done that he should be doomed to so cruel a death?' Petro laughed and thrust at him with the lance; the Cossack fell with his child to the bottom. Petro took all his goods and began to live like a Pasha. No one had such droves of horses as Petro; no one had such flocks of sheep. And Petro died.

"After he was dead, God summoned the two brothers, Ivan and Petro, to the judgment-seat. 'This man is a great sinner,' said God. 'Ivan, it will take me long to find a punishment for him; you choose him a punishment!' For a long time Ivan pondered what punishment to fix and at last he said:

"That man did me a great injury: he betrayed his brother like a Judas and robbed me of my honourable name and offspring. And a man without honourable name and offspring is like a seed of corn dropped into the earth and wasted in vain. If it does not sprout, no one knows that the seed has been dropped into the earth."

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"Let it be, O Lord, that none of his descendants may be happy upon earth; that the last of his race may be the worst criminal that has ever been seen, and that at every crime he commits, his ancestors, unable to rest in their graves and suffering torments unknown to the world of the living, should rise from the tomb! And that the Judas, Petro, should be unable to rise and that hence he should suffer pain all the more intense; that he should bite the earth like one possessed and writhe underground!"

"And when the time comes that that man's wickedness has reached its full measure, let me, O Lord God, rise on my horse from the precipice to the highest peak of the mountains, and let him come to me and I will throw him from that mountain into the deepest abyss. And let all his dead ancestors, wherever they lived in their lifetime, come from various parts of the earth to gnaw him for the sufferings he inflicted upon them, and let them gnaw him for ever, and I should rejoice looking at his sufferings. And let the Judas, Petro, be unable to rise out of the earth, that he should lust to gnaw but be forced to gnaw himself, and that his bones should grow bigger and bigger as time goes on, so that his pain may be the greater. That torture will be worse for him than any other, for there is no greater torture for a man than to long for revenge and be unable to take it."

"A terrible punishment thou hast devised, O man . . . !" God said. "All shall be as thou hast said; but thou shalt sit for ever on thy horse there and shalt not enter the Kingdom of Heaven!" And so it

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all was fulfilled accordingly; the strange horseman still sits on his steed in the Carpathians and sees the dead men gnawing the corpse in the bottomless abyss and feels how the dead Petro grows larger underground, gnaws his bones in dreadful agony and sets the earth quaking fearfully."

The blind man had finished his song; he began thrumming the strings again and singing amusing ballads about Homa and Yeryoma, and Stklyar Stokoza . . . But his listeners, old and young, could not rouse themselves from reverie; they still stood with bowed heads, pondering on the terrible story of long ago.

IVAN FYODOROVITCH SHPONKA
AND HIS AUNT

THERE is a story about this story: we were told it by Stepan Ivanovitch Kurotchka, who came over from Gadyatch. You must know that my memory is incredibly poor: you may tell me a thing or not tell it, it is all the same. It is just pouring water into a sieve. Being aware of this failing, I purposely begged him to write the story down in an exercise-book. Well, God give him good health, he was always a kind man to me, he set to work and wrote it down. I put it in the little table; I expect you know it; it stands in the corner as you come in by the door. . . . But there, I forgot that you had never been in my house. My old woman, with whom I have lived thirty years, has never learnt to read—no use hiding one's shortcomings. Well, I noticed that she baked the pies on paper of some sort. She bakes pies beautifully, dear readers; you will never taste better pies anywhere. I happened to look on the underside of a pie—what do I see? Written words! My heart seemed to tell me at once: I went to the table, only half the book was there! All the other pages she had carried off for the pies! What could I do? There is no fighting at our age! Last year I happened to be passing through Gadyatch. Before I reached the town I purposely tied a knot in my handkerchief that I might not forget to ask Stepan Ivanovitch about it. That was not all, I vowed to myself that as soon as ever I sneezed in the town I

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IVAN SHPONKA AND HIS AUNT

would be sure to think of it. It was all no use. I drove through the town and sneezed and blew my nose too, but still I forgot it; and I only thought of it nearly five miles after I had passed through the town-gate. There was no help for it, I had to print it without the end. However, if any one particularly wants to know what happened later on in the story, he need only go on purpose to Gadyatch and ask Stepan Ivanovitch. He will be glad to tell the story, I daresay, all over again from the beginning. He lives not far from the brick church. There is a little lane close by, and as soon as you turn into the lane it is the second or third gate. Or better still, when you see a big post with a quail on it in the yard and coming to meet you a stout peasant woman in a green petticoat (it may be as well to mention that he is a bachelor), that is his yard. Though indeed you may meet him in the market, where he is to be seen every morning before nine o'clock, choosing fish and vegetables for his table and talking to Father Antip or the Jewish contractor. You will know him at once, for there is no one else who has trousers of flowered linen and a yellow cotton coat. And another thing you may know him by—he always swings his arms as he walks. Denis Petrovitch, the assessor, now deceased, always used to say when he saw him in the distance, "Look, look, here comes our windmill!"

I

IVAN FYODOROVITCH SHPONKA

It is four years since Ivan Fyodorovitch retired from the army and came to live on his farm Vytrenbenki.

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When he was still Vanyusha, he was at the Gadyatch district school, and I must say he was a very well-behaved and industrious boy. Nikifor Timofyevitch Dyepritchastie, the teacher of Russian grammar, used to say that if all the boys had been as anxious to do their best as Shponka, he would not have brought into the class-room the maplewood ruler with which, as he owned himself, he was tired of hitting the lazy and mischievous boys' hands. His exercise-book was always neat, with a ruled margin, and not the tiniest blot anywhere. He always sat quietly with his arms folded and his eyes fixed on the teacher, and he never used to stick scraps of paper on the back of the boy sitting in front of him, never cut the form and never played at shoving the other boys off the form before the master came in. If any one wanted a penknife to mend his pen, he immediately applied to Ivan Fyodorovitch knowing that he always had a penknife, and Ivan Fyodorovitch, at that time simply Vanyusha, would take it out of a little leather case attached to a buttonhole of his grey coat, and would only request that the sharp edge should not be used for scraping the pen, pointing out that there was a blunt side for the purpose. Such good conduct soon attracted the attention of the Latin master, whose cough in the passage was enough to reduce the class to terror, even before his frieze coat and pockmarked countenance had appeared in the doorway. This terrible master, who always had two birches lying on his desk and half of whose pupils were always on their knees, made Ivan Fyodorovitch monitor, although there were many boys in the class of much greater ability. Here I cannot omit an incident which had an influence

on the whole of his future life. One of the boys entrusted to his charge tried to induce his monitor to write *scit* on his report, though he had not learnt his lesson, by bringing into class a pancake soaked in butter and wrapped in paper. Though Ivan Fyodorovitch was usually conscientious, on this occasion he was hungry and could not resist the temptation: he took the pancake, held a book up before him and began eating it, and he was so absorbed in this occupation that he did not observe that a deathly silence had fallen upon the class-room. He only woke up with horror when a terrible hand protruding from a frieze overcoat seized him by the ear and dragged him into the middle of the room. "Hand over that pancake! Hand it over, I tell you, you rascal!" said the terrible master; he seized the buttery pancake in his fingers and flung it out of window, sternly forbidding the boys running about in the yard to pick it up. Then he proceeded on the spot to whack Ivan Fyodorovitch very painfully on the hands; and quite rightly—the hands were responsible for taking it and no other part of the body. Anyway, the timidity which had always been characteristic of him was more marked from that time forward. Possibly the same incident was the explanation of his feeling no desire to enter the civil service, having learnt by experience that one is not always successful in hiding one's misdeeds.

He was very nearly fifteen when he moved up into the second class, where instead of the four rules of arithmetic and the abridged catechism, he went on to the longer one, the book of the duties of man, and fractions. But seeing that the further you went into the

forest the thicker the wood became, and receiving the news that his father had departed this life, he stayed only two years longer at school, and with his mother's consent went into the P—— infantry regiment.

The P—— infantry regiment was not at all of the class to which many infantry regiments belong, and, although it was for the most part stationed in country places, it was in no way inferior to many cavalry regiments. The majority of the officers drank neat spirit and were quite as good at dragging about Jews by their curls as any Hussars; some of them even danced the mazurka, and the colonel of the regiment never missed an opportunity of mentioning the fact when he was talking to any one in company. "Among my officers," he used to say, patting himself on the belly after every word, "a number dance the mazurka, quite a number of them, really a great number of them indeed." To show our readers the degree of culture of the P—— infantry regiment, we must add that two of the officers were passionately fond of the game of bank and used to gamble away their uniforms, caps, overcoats, sword-knots and even their underclothes, which is more than you could find in every cavalry regiment.

Contact with such comrades did not, however, diminish Ivan Fyodorovitch's timidity; and as he did not drink neat spirit, preferring to it a wineglassful of ordinary vodka before dinner and supper, did not dance the mazurka or play bank, naturally he was bound to be always left alone. And so it came to pass that while the others were driving about with hired horses, visiting the less important landowners, he sitting at home spent his time in pursuits peculiar to a mild and gentle soul: he either polished his buttons, or read a dream-

book or set mouse-traps in the corners of his room, or failing everything he would take off his uniform and lie on his bed.

On the other hand, no one in the regiment was more punctual in his duties than Ivan Fyodorovitch, and he drilled his platoon in such a way that the commander of the company always held him up as a model to the others. Consequently in a short time, eleven years after becoming an ensign, he was promoted to be a second lieutenant.

During that time he had received the news that his mother was dead, and his aunt, his mother's sister, whom he only knew from her bringing him in his childhood—and even sending him when he was at Gadyatch—dried pears and extremely nice honeycakes which she made herself (she was on bad terms with his mother and so Ivan Fyodorovitch had not seen her in later years), this aunt, in the goodness of her heart, undertook to look after his little estate and in due time informed him of the fact by letter.

Ivan Fyodorovitch, having the fullest confidence in his aunt's good sense, continued to perform his duties as before. Some men in his position would have grown conceited at such promotion, but pride was a feeling of which he knew nothing, and as lieutenant he was the same Ivan Fyodorovitch as he had been when an ensign. He spent another four years in the regiment after the event of so much consequence to him, and was about to leave the Mogilyev district for Great Russia with his regiment when he received a letter as follows:

"MY DEAR NEPHEW, IVAN FYODOROVITCH,—I am sending you some linen: five pairs of thread socks and

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four shirts of fine linen; and what is more I want to talk to you of something serious; since you have already a rank of some importance, as I suppose you are aware, and have reached a time of life when it is fitting to take up the management of your land, there is no reason for you to remain longer in military service. I am getting old and can no longer see to everything on your farm; and in fact there is a great deal that I want to talk to you about in person.

"Come, Vanyusha! Looking forward to the real pleasure of seeing you, I remain your very affectionate Aunt

"VASSILISSA TSUPTCHEVSKA.

"P.S.—There is a wonderful turnip in our kitchen garden, more like a potato than a turnip."

A week after receiving this letter Ivan Fyodorovitch wrote an answer as follows:

"HONOURED MADAM, AUNTIE, VASSILISSA KASHPAROVNA,—Thank you very much for sending the linen. My socks especially are very old, my orderly has darned them four times and that has made them very tight. As to your views in regard to my service in the army, I completely agree with you, and the day before yesterday I sent in my papers. As soon as I get my discharge I will engage a chaise. As to your commission in regard to the seed wheat and Siberian corn I cannot carry it out; there is none in all the Mogilyev province. About here pigs are mostly fed on brewers' grains together with a little beer when it has grown flat. With the greatest respect, honoured madam and auntie, I remain your nephew

"IVAN SHPONKA."

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IVAN SHPONKA AND HIS AUNT

At last Ivan Fyodorovitch received his discharge with the grade of lieutenant, hired for forty roubles a Jew to drive from Mogilyev to Gadyatch, and set off in the chaise just at the time when the trees are clothed with young and still scanty leaves, the whole earth is bright with fresh green, and there is the fragrance of spring over all the fields.

II

THE JOURNEY

Nothing of great interest occurred on the journey. They were travelling a little over a fortnight. Ivan Fyodorovitch might have arrived a little sooner than that, but the devout Jew kept the Sabbath on the Saturdays and, putting his horse-cloth over his head, prayed the whole day. Ivan Fyodorovitch, however, as I have had occasion to mention already, was a man who did not give way to being bored. During these intervals he undid his trunk, took out his underclothes, inspected them thoroughly to see whether they were properly washed and folded; carefully removed the fluff from his new uniform, which had been made without epaulettes, and repacked it all in the best possible way. He was not fond of reading in general; and if he did sometimes look into a dream-book, it was because he liked to meet again what he had already read several times. In the same way one who lives in the town goes every day to the club, not for the sake of hearing anything new there, but in order to meet there friends with whom it has been his habit to chat at the club from time immemorial. In the same way a government clerk will read a directory of addresses with immense

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satisfaction several times a day with no ulterior object, he is simply entertained by the printed list of names. "Ah! Ivan Gavrilovitch So-and-so . . ." he murmurs mutely to himself. "And here again am I! h'm . . .!" and next time he reads it over again with exactly the same exclamations.

After a fortnight's journey Ivan Fyodorovitch reached a little village some eighty miles from Gadyatch. This was on Friday. The sun had long set when with the chaise and the Jew he reached an inn.

This inn differed in no respects from other little village inns. As a rule the traveller is zealously regaled in them with hay and oats, as though he were a post-horse. But should he want to lunch as decent people do lunch, he keeps his appetite intact for some future opportunity. Ivan Fyodorovitch, knowing all this, had provided himself beforehand with two bundles of breadrings and a sausage, and asking for a glass of vodka, of which there is never a shortage in any inn, he began his supper, sitting down on a bench before an oak table which was fixed immovably in the clay floor.

Meanwhile he heard the rattle of a chaise. The gates creaked but it was a long while before the chaise drove into the yard. A loud voice was engaged in scolding the old woman who kept the inn. "I will drive in," Ivan Fyodorovitch heard, "but if I am bitten by a single bug in your inn, I will beat you, on my soul I will, you old witch! and I will give you nothing for your hay!"

A minute later the door opened and there walked—or rather squeezed himself—in a stout man in a green frock-coat. His head rested immovably on his short neck, which seemed even thicker, from a double chin.

To judge from his appearance, he belonged to that class of men who do not trouble their heads about trifles and whose whole life has passed easily.

"I wish you good day, honoured sir!" he pronounced on seeing Ivan Fyodorovitch.

Ivan Fyodorovitch bowed in silence.

"Allow me to ask, to whom have I the honour of speaking?" the stout newcomer continued.

At such an examination Ivan Fyodorovitch involuntarily got up and stood at attention as he usually did when the colonel asked him a question. "Retired Lieutenant Ivan Fyodorovitch Shponka," he answered.

"And may I ask what place you are bound for?"

"My own farm Vytrebenki."

"Vytrebenki!" cried the stern examiner. "Allow me, honoured sir, allow me!" he said, going towards him, and waving his arms as though some one were hindering him or as though he were making his way through a crowd, he folded Ivan Fyodorovitch in an embrace and kissed him first on the right cheek and then on the left and then on the right again. Ivan Fyodorovitch was much gratified by this kiss, for his lips were pressed against the stranger's fat cheeks as though against soft cushions.

"Allow me to make your acquaintance, my dear sir!" the fat man continued: "I am a landowner of the same district of Gadyatch and your neighbour; I live not more than four miles from your Vytrebenki in the village of Hortyshtche; and my name is Grigory Grigoryevitch Stortchenko. You really must, sir, you really must pay me a visit at Hortyshtche. I won't speak to you if you don't. I am in haste now on business. . . . Why, what's this?" he said in a mild voice

EVENINGS NEAR DIKANKA

to his postilion, a boy in a Cossack tunic with patched elbows and a bewildered expression, who came in and put bags and boxes on the table. "What's this, what's the meaning of it?" and by degrees Grigory Grigoryevitch's voice grew more and more threatening. "Did I tell you to put them here, my good lad? Did I tell you to put them here, you rascal? Didn't I tell you to heat the chicken up first, you scoundrel? Be off!" he shouted, stamping. "Stay, you fright! Where's the basket with the bottles? Ivan Fyodorovitch!" he said, pouring out a glass of liqueur, "I beg you take some cordial!"

"Oh, really, I cannot . . . I have already had occasion. . ." Ivan Fyodorovitch began hesitatingly.

"I won't hear a word, sir!" the gentleman raised his voice, "I won't hear a word! I won't budge till you drink it. . . ."

Ivan Fyodorovitch, seeing that it was impossible to refuse, not without gratification emptied the glass.

"This is a fowl, sir," said the fat Grigory Grigoryevitch, carving it in a wooden box. "I must tell you that my cook Yavdoha is fond of a drop at times and so she often dries up things. Hey, lad!" here he turned to the boy in the Cossack tunic who was bringing in a feather-bed and pillows, "make my bed on the floor in the middle of the room! Mind you put plenty of hay under the pillow! And pull a bit of hemp from the woman's distaff to stop up my ears for the night! I must tell you, sir, that I have the habit of stopping up my ears at night ever since the damnable occasion when a cockroach crawled into my left ear in a Great Russian inn. The confounded long-beards, as I found out afterwards, eat their soup with beetles in it. Impossible to

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describe what happened to me; there was such a tickling, such a tickling in my ear. . . . I was downright crazy! I was cured by a simple old woman in our district, and by what do you suppose? Simply by whispering to it. What do you think, my dear sir, about doctors? What I think is that they simply hoax us and make fools of us: some old women know a dozen times as much as all these doctors."

"Indeed, what you say is perfectly true, sir. There certainly are cases . . ." Here Ivan Fyodorovitch paused as though he could not find the right word. It may not be amiss to mention here that he was at no time lavish of words. This may have been due to timidity, or it may have been due to a desire to express himself elegantly.

"Shake up the hay properly, shake it up properly!" said Grigory Grigoryevitch to his servant. "The hay is so bad about here that you may come upon a twig in it any minute. Allow me, sir, to wish you a good night! We shall not see each other to-morrow. I am setting off before dawn. Your Jew will keep the Sabbath because to-morrow is Saturday, so it is no good for you to get up early. Don't forget my invitation; I won't speak to you if you don't come to see me at Hortyshtche."

At this point Grigory Grigoryevitch's servant pulled off his coat and high boots and gave him his dressing-gown instead, and Grigory Grigoryevitch stretched on his bed, and it looked as though one huge feather-bed were lying on another.

"Hey, lad! where are you, rascal? Come here and arrange my quilt. Hey, lad, prop up my head with hay! Have you watered the horses yet? Some more

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hay! here, under this side! And do arrange the quilt properly, you rascal! That's right, more! Ough . . . !"

Then Grigory Grigoryevitch heaved two sighs and filled the whole room with a terrible whistling through his nose, snoring so loudly at times that the old woman who was snoozing on the settle, suddenly waking up, looked about her in all directions, but, seeing nothing, subsided and went to sleep again.

When Ivan Fyodorovitch woke up next morning, the fat gentleman was no longer there. This was the only noteworthy incident that occurred on the journey. Two days later he drew near his little farm.

He felt his heart begin to throb when the windmill waving its sails peeped out and, as the Jew drove his nag up the hill, the row of willows came into sight below. The pond gleamed bright and shining through them and a breath of freshness rose from it. Here he used to bathe in old days; in that pond he used to wade with the peasant lads up to his neck after crayfish. The covered cart mounted the dam and Ivan Fyodorovitch saw the little old-fashioned house thatched with reeds, and the apple trees and cherry trees which he used to climb on the sly. He had no sooner driven into the yard than dogs of all kinds, brown, black, grey, spotted, ran up from every side. Some flew under the horse's hoofs, barking, others ran behind the cart, noticing that the axle was smeared with bacon fat; one, standing near the kitchen and keeping his paw on a bone, uttered a volley of shrill barks; and another gave tongue in the distance, running to and fro wagging his tail and seeming to say: "Look, good Christians! what a fine young fellow I am!" Boys in grubby shirts

ran out to stare. A sow who was promenading in the yard with sixteen little pigs lifted her snout with an inquisitive air and grunted louder than usual. In the yard a number of hempen sheets were lying on the ground covered with wheat, millet and barley drying in the sun. A good many different kinds of herbs, such as wild chicory and swine-herb, were drying on the roof.

Ivan Fyodorovitch was so occupied in scrutinising all this that he was only roused when a spotted dog bit the Jew on the calf of his leg as he was getting down from the box. The servants who ran out, that is the cook and another woman and two girls in woollen petticoats, after the first exclamations: "It's our young master!" informed him that his aunt was sowing sweet corn together with the girl Palashka and Omelko the coachman, who often performed the duties of a gardener and watchman also. But his aunt, who had seen the sack-covered cart in the distance, was already on the spot. And Ivan Fyodorovitch was astonished when she almost lifted him from the ground in her arms, hardly able to believe that this could be the aunt who had written to him of her old age and infirmities.

III

AUNTIE

Auntie Vassilissa Kashparovna was at this time about fifty. She had never been married, and commonly declared that she valued her maiden state above everything. Though, indeed, to the best of my memory, no one ever courted her. This was due to the fact that all

men were sensible of a certain timidity in her presence, and never had the spirit to make her an offer. "A girl of great character, Vassilissa Kashparovna!" all the young men used to say, and they were quite right, too, for there was no one Vassilissa Kashparovna could not get the whip hand of. With her own manly hand, tugging every day at his topknot of curls, she could, unaided, turn the drunken miller, a worthless fellow, into a perfect treasure. She was of almost gigantic stature and her breadth and strength were fully in proportion. It seemed as though nature had made an unpardonable mistake in condemning her to wear a dark brown gown with little flounces on weekdays and a red cashmere shawl on Sunday and on her name-day, though a dragoon's moustaches and high topboots would have suited her better than anything. On the other hand, her pursuits completely corresponded with her appearance: she rowed the boat herself and was more skilful with the oars than any fisherman; shot game; stood over the mowers all the while they were at work; knew the exact number of the melons, of all kinds, in the kitchen garden; took a toll of five kopecks from every waggon that crossed her dam; climbed the trees and shook down the pears; beat lazy vassals with her terrible hand and with the same menacing hand bestowed a glass of vodka on the deserving. Almost at the same moment she was scolding, dyeing yarn, racing to the kitchen, brewing kvass, making jam with honey; she was busy all day long and everywhere in the nick of time. The result of all this was that Ivan Fyodorovitch's little property, which had consisted of eighteen souls at the last census, was flourishing in the fullest sense of the word. Moreover, she had a very warm

affection for her nephew and carefully accumulated kopecks for him.

From the time of his arrival at his home Ivan Fyodorovitch's life was completely transformed and took an entirely different turn. It seemed as though nature had designed him expressly for looking after an estate of eighteen souls. Auntie herself observed that he would make an excellent farmer, though she did not yet permit him to meddle in every branch of the management. "He's but a young child yet," she used commonly to say, though Ivan Fyodorovitch was as a fact not far off forty. "How should he know it all!"

However, he was always in the fields with the reapers and mowers, and this was a source of unutterable pleasure to his gentle heart. The sweep of a dozen or more gleaming scythes in unison; the sound of the grass falling in even swathes; the carolling songs of the reapers at intervals, at one time joyous as the welcoming of a guest, at another mournful as parting; the calm pure evening—and what an evening! How free and fresh the air! How everything revived; the steppe flushed red then turned dark blue and gleamed with flowers; quails, bustards, gulls, grasshoppers, thousands of insects and all of them whistling, buzzing, churring, calling and suddenly blending into a harmonious chorus; nothing silent for an instant, while the sun sets and is hidden. Oh, how fresh and delightful it was! Here and there about the fields camp-fires are built and cauldrons set over them, and round the fires the mowers sit down; the steam from the dumplings floats upwards; the twilight turns greyer. . . . It is hard to say what passed in Ivan Fyodorovitch at such times. When he joined the mowers, he forgot to try their dumplings,

though he liked them particularly, and stood motionless, watching a gull disappear in the sky or counting the sheaves of corn dotted over the field.

In a short time Ivan Fyodorovitch was spoken of as a great farmer. Auntie was never tired of rejoicing over her nephew and never lost an opportunity of boasting of him. One day—it was just after the end of the harvest, that is at the end of July—Vassilissa Kashparovna took Ivan Fyodorovitch by the arm with a mysterious air, and said she wanted now to speak to him of a matter which had long been on her mind.

"You are aware, dear Ivan Fyodorovitch," she began, "that there are eighteen souls on your farm, though, indeed, that is by the census register, and in reality they may reckon up to more, they may be twenty-four. But that is not the point. You know the copse that lies behind our vegetable ground, and no doubt you know the broad meadow behind it; there are very nearly sixty acres in it; and the grass is so good that it is worth a hundred roubles every year, especially if, as they say, a cavalry regiment is to be stationed at Gadyatch."

"To be sure, Auntie, I know: the grass is very good."

"You needn't tell me the grass is very good, I know it; but do you know that all that land is by rights yours? Why do you look so surprised? Listen, Ivan Fyodorovitch! You remember Stepan Kuzmitch? What am I saying: 'you remember'! You were so little that you could not even pronounce his name. Yes, indeed! How could you remember! When I came on the very eve of St. Philip's Fast and took you in my arms, you almost ruined my dress; luckily I was just in time to hand you to your nurse, Matryona;

you were such a horrid little thing then . . . ! But that is not the point. All the land beyond our farm, and the village of Hortyshtche itself belonged to Stepan Kuzmitch. I must tell you that before you were in this world he used to visit your mamma—though, indeed, only when your father was not at home. Not that I say it in blame of her—God rest her soul!—though your poor mother was always unfair to me! But that is not the point. Be that as it may, Stepan Kuzmitch made a deed of gift to you of that same estate of which I have been speaking. But your poor mamma, between ourselves, was a very strange character. The devil himself (God forgive me for the nasty word!) would have been puzzled to understand her. What she did with that deed of gift—God only knows. It's my opinion that it is in the hands of that old bachelor, Grigory Grigoryevitch Stortchenko. That pot-bellied rascal has got hold of the whole estate. I'd bet anything you like that he has hidden that deed."

"Allow me to ask, Auntie: isn't he the Stortchenko whose acquaintance I made at the inn?" Hereupon Ivan Fyodorovitch described his meeting with Stortchenko.

"Who knows," said his aunt after a moment's thought, "perhaps he is not a rascal. It's true that it's only six months since he came to live among us; there's no finding out what a man is in that time. The old lady, his mother, is a very sensible woman, so I hear, and they say she is a great hand at salting cucumbers; her own serf-girls can make capital rugs. But as you say he gave you such a friendly welcome, go and see him, perhaps the old sinner will listen to his conscience and will give up what is not his. If you like you can go in the

chaise, only those confounded brats have pulled out all the nails at the back; you must tell the coachman, Omelko, to nail the leather on better everywhere."

"What for, Auntie? I will take the trap that you sometimes go out shooting in."

With that the conversation ended.

IV

THE DINNER

It was about dinner-time when Ivan Fyodorovitch drove into the hamlet of Hortyshtche and he felt a little timid as he approached the manor-house. It was a long house, not thatched with reeds like the houses of many of the neighbouring landowners, but with a wooden roof. Two barns in the yard also had wooden roofs: the gate was of oak. Ivan Fyodorovitch felt like a dandy who, on arriving at a ball, sees every one more smartly dressed than himself. He stopped his trap by the barn as a sign of respect and went on foot towards the front door.

"Ah, Ivan Fyodorovitch!" cried the fat man Grigory Grigoryevitch, who was crossing the yard in his coat but without cravat, waistcoat and braces. But apparently this attire weighed oppressively on his bulky person, for the perspiration was streaming down him.

"Why, you said you would come as soon as you had seen your aunt, and all this time you have not been here?" After these words Ivan Fyodorovitch's lips found themselves again in contact with the same cushions.

"Chiefly being busy looking after the land. . . . I have come just for a minute to see you on business. . . ."

"For a minute? Well, that won't do. Hey, lad!" shouted the fat gentleman, and the same boy in the Cossack tunic ran out of the kitchen. "Tell Kassyan to shut the gate tight, do you hear! make it fast! And take this gentleman's horse out of the shafts this minute. Please come indoors; it is so hot out here that my shirt's soaked."

On going indoors Ivan Fyodorovitch made up his mind to lose no time and in spite of his shyness to act with decision.

"My aunt had the honour . . . she told me that a deed of gift of the late Stepan Kuzmitch . . ."

It is difficult to describe the unpleasant grimace made by the broad countenance of Grigory Grigoryevitch at these words.

"Oh dear, I hear nothing!" he responded. "I must tell you that a cockroach got into my left ear (those bearded Russians breed cockroaches in all their huts); no pen can describe what agony it was, it kept tickling and tickling. An old woman cured me by the simplest means. . . ."

"I meant to say . . ." Ivan Fyodorovitch ventured to interrupt, seeing that Grigory Grigoryevitch was intentionally changing the subject; "that in the late Stepan Kuzmitch's will mention is made, so to speak, of a deed of gift. . . . According to it I ought . . ."

"I know; so your aunt has told you that story already. It's a lie, upon my soul it is! My uncle made no deed of gift. Though, indeed, some such deed is re-

ferred to in the will. But where is it? No one has produced it. I tell you this because I sincerely wish you well. Upon my soul it is a lie!"

Ivan Fyodorovitch said nothing, reflecting that possibly his aunt really might be mistaken.

"Ah, here comes mother with my sisters!" said Grigory Grigoryevitch, "so dinner is ready. Let us go!"

Thereupon he drew Ivan Fyodorovitch by the hand into a room in which vodka and savouries were standing on the table.

At the same time a short little old lady, a regular coffee-pot in a cap, with two young ladies, one fair and one dark, came in. Ivan Fyodorovitch, like a well-bred gentleman, went up to kiss the old lady's hand and then to kiss the hands of the two young ladies.

"This is our neighbour, Ivan Fyodorovitch Shponka, mother," said Grigory Grigoryevitch.

The old lady looked intently at Ivan Fyodorovitch, or perhaps it only seemed that she looked intently at him. She was good-natured simplicity itself, though; she looked as though she would like to ask Ivan Fyodorovitch: "How many cucumbers have you salted for the winter?"

"Have you had some vodka?" the old lady asked.

"You can't have had your sleep out, mother," said Grigory Grigoryevitch. "Who asks a visitor whether he has had anything. You offer it to him, that's all: whether we have had any or not, that is our business. Ivan Fyodorovitch! the centaury-flavoured vodka or the Trofimov brand? Which do you prefer? And you, Ivan Ivanovitch, why are you standing there?" Grigory Grigoryevitch brought out, turning round, and

Ivan Fyodorovitch saw the gentleman so addressed approaching the vodka, in a frock-coat with long skirts and an immense stand-up collar, which covered the whole back of his head, so that his head sat in it, as though it were a chaise.

Ivan Ivanovitch went up to the vodka and rubbed his hands, carefully examined the wineglass, filled it, held it up to the light, and poured all the vodka at once into his mouth. He did not, however, swallow it at once, but rinsed his mouth thoroughly with it first before finally swallowing it, and then after eating some bread and salted mushrooms, he turned to Ivan Fyodorovitch.

"Is it not Ivan Fyodorovitch, Mr. Shponka, I have the honour of addressing?"

"Yes, certainly," answered Ivan Fyodorovitch.

"You have changed a great deal, sir, since I saw you last. Why!" he continued, "I remember you that high!" As he spoke he held his hand a yard from the floor. "Your poor father, God grant him the kingdom of Heaven, was a rare man. He used to have melons such as you never see anywhere now. Here, for instance," he went on, drawing him aside, "they'll set melons before you on the table—such melons! You won't care to look at them! Would you believe it, sir, he used to have water-melons," he pronounced with a mysterious air, flinging out his arms as if he were about to embrace a stout tree trunk, "upon my soul as big as this!"

"Come to dinner!" said Grigory Grigoryevitch, taking Ivan Fyodorovitch by the arm.

Grigory Grigoryevitch sat down in his usual place at the end of the table, draped with an enormous table-

napkin which made him resemble the Greek heroes depicted by barbers on their signs. Ivan Fyodorovitch, blushing, sat down in the place assigned to him, facing the two young ladies; and Ivan Ivanovitch did not let slip the chance of sitting down beside him, inwardly rejoicing that he had some one to whom he could impart his various items of information.

"You shouldn't take the bishop's nose, Ivan Fyodorovitch! It's a turkey!" said the old lady, addressing Ivan Fyodorovitch, to whom the rustic waiter in a grey swallow-tail patched with black was offering a dish. "Take the back!"

"Mother! no one asked you to interfere!" commented Grigory Grigoryevitch. "You may be sure our visitor knows what to take himself! Ivan Fyodorovitch! take a wing, the other one there with the gizzard! But why have you taken so little? Take a leg! Why do you stand gaping with the dish? Ask him! Go down on your knees, rascal! Say, at once, 'Ivan Fyodorovitch, take a leg!'"

"Ivan Fyodorovitch, take a leg!" the waiter with the dish bawled, kneeling down.

"H'm! do you call this a turkey?" Ivan Ivanovitch muttered in a low voice, turning to his neighbour with an air of disdain. "Is that what a turkey ought to look like? If you could see my turkeys! I assure you there is more fat on one of them than on a dozen of these. Would you believe me, sir, they are really a repulsive sight when they walk about my yard, they are so fat . . . !"

"Ivan Ivanovitch, you are telling lies!" said Grigory Grigoryevitch, overhearing these remarks.

"I tell you," Ivan Ivanovitch went on talking to his

neighbour, affecting not to hear what Grigory Grigoryevitch had said, "last year when I sent them to Gadyatch, they offered me fifty kopecks apiece for them, and I wouldn't take even that."

"Ivan Ivanovitch! I tell you, you are lying!" observed Grigory Grigoryevitch, dwelling on each syllable for greater distinctness and speaking more loudly than before.

But Ivan Ivanovitch behaved as though the words could not possibly refer to him; he went on as before, but in a much lower voice: "Yes, sir, I would not take it. There is not a gentleman in Gadyatch . . ."

"Ivan Ivanovitch! you are a fool, and that's the truth," Grigory Grigoryevitch said in a loud voice. "Ivan Fyodorovitch knows all about it better than you do, and doesn't believe you."

At this Ivan Ivanovitch was really offended: he said no more, but fell to putting away the turkey, even though it was not so fat as those that were a repulsive sight.

The clatter of knives, spoons and plates took the place of conversation for a time, but loudest of all was the sound made by Grigory Grigoryevitch, smacking his lips over the marrow out of the mutton bones.

"Have you," inquired Ivan Ivanovitch after an interval of silence, poking his head out of the chaise, "read the 'Travels of Korobeynikov in the Holy Land'? It's a real delight to heart and soul! Such books aren't published nowadays. I very much regret that I did not notice in what year it was written."

Ivan Fyodorovitch, hearing mention of a book, applied himself diligently to taking sauce.

"It is truly marvellous, sir, when you think that a

humble artisan visited all those places: over two thousand miles, sir! over two thousand miles! Truly, it was by divine grace that it was vouchsafed him to reach Palestine and Jerusalem."

"So you say," said Ivan Fyodorovitch, who had heard a great deal about Jerusalem from his orderly, "that he visited Jerusalem."

"What are you saying, Ivan Fyodorovitch?" Grigory Grigoryevitch inquired from the end of the table.

"I had occasion to observe what distant lands there are in the world!" said Ivan Fyodorovitch, genuinely gratified that he had succeeded in uttering so long and difficult a sentence.

"Don't you believe him, Ivan Fyodorovitch!" said Grigory Grigoryevitch, who had not quite caught what he said, "he always tells fibs!"

Meanwhile dinner was over. Grigory Grigoryevitch went to his own room, as his habit was, for a little nap; and the visitors followed their aged hostess and the young ladies into the drawing-room, where the same table on which they had left vodka when they went out to dinner was now as though by some magical transformation covered with little saucers of jam of various sorts and dishes of cherries and different kinds of melons.

The absence of Grigory Grigoryevitch was perceptible in everything: the old lady became more disposed to talk and, of her own accord, without being asked, revealed several secrets in regard to the making of apple cheese, and the drying of pears. Even the young ladies began talking; though the fair one, who looked some six years younger than her sister and who was apparently about five-and-twenty, was rather silent.

But Ivan Ivanovitch was more talkative and livelier than any one. Feeling secure that no one would snub or contradict him, he talked of cucumbers and of planting potatoes and of how much more sensible people were in old days—no comparison with what people are now!—and of how as time goes on everything improves and the most intricate inventions are discovered. He was, indeed, one of those persons who take great pleasure in relieving their souls by conversation and will talk of anything that possibly can be talked about. If the conversation touched upon grave and solemn subjects, Ivan Ivanovitch sighed after each word and nodded his head slightly: if the subject were of a more homely character, he would pop his head out of his chaise and make faces from which one could almost, it seemed, read how to make pear kvass, how large were the melons of which he was speaking and how fat were the geese that were running about in his yard.

At last, with great difficulty and not before evening, Ivan Fyodorovitch succeeded in taking his leave, and although he was usually ready to give way and they almost kept him for the night by force, he persisted in his intention of going—and went.

V

AUNTIE'S NEW PLANS

"Well, did you get the deed of gift out of the old reprobate?" Such was the question with which Ivan Fyodorovitch was greeted by his aunt, who had been expecting him for some hours in the porch and had at last been unable to resist going out to the gate.

"No, Auntie," said Ivan Fyodorovitch, getting out of the trap: "Grigory Grigoryevitch has no deed of gift!"

"And you believed him? He was lying, the confounded fellow! Some day I shall come across him and I will give him a drubbing with my own hands. Oh, I'd get rid of some of his fat for him! Though perhaps we ought first to consult our court assessor and see if we couldn't get the law of him. . . . But that's not the point now. Well, was the dinner good?"

"Very . . . yes, excellent, Auntie!"

"Well, what did you have? Tell me. The old lady, I know, is a great hand at looking after the cooking."

"Curd fritters with sour cream, Auntie: a stew of stuffed pigeons . . ."

"And a turkey with pickled plums?" asked his aunt, for she was herself very skilful in the preparation of that dish.

"Yes, there was a turkey, too . . . ! Very handsome young ladies Grigory Grigoryevitch's sisters, especially the fair one!"

"Ah!" said Auntie, and she looked intently at Ivan Fyodorovitch, who dropped his eyes, blushing. A new idea flashed into her mind. "Come, tell me," she said eagerly and with curiosity, "what are her eyebrows like?" It may not be amiss to observe that Auntie considered fine eyebrows as the most important item in a woman's looks.

"Her eyebrows, Auntie, are exactly like what you described yours as being when you were young. And there are little freckles all over her face."

"Ah," commented his aunt, well pleased with Ivan Fyodorovitch's observation, though he had had no idea

of paying her a compliment. "What sort of dress was she wearing? Though, indeed, it's hard to get good material nowadays, such as I have here, for instance, in this gown. But that's not the point. Well, did you talk to her about anything?"

"Talk . . . how do you mean, Auntie? Perhaps you are imagining . . ."

"Well, what of it, there would be nothing strange in that? Such is God's will! It may have been ordained at your birth that you should make a match of it."

"I don't know how you can say such a thing, Auntie. That shows that you don't know me at all. . . ."

"Well, well, now he is offended," said his aunt. "He's still only a child!" she thought to herself: "he knows nothing! We must bring them together—let them get to know each other!"

Hereupon Auntie went to have a look at the kitchen and left Ivan Fyodorovitch alone. But from that time forward she thought of nothing but seeing her nephew married as soon as possible and fondling his little ones. Her brain was absorbed in making preparations for the wedding, and it was noticeable that she bustled about more busily than ever, though the work was the worse rather than the better for it. Often when she was making the pies, a job which she never left to the cook, she would forget everything, and imagining that a tiny great-nephew was standing by her asking for some pie, would absently hold out her hands with the nicest bit for him, and the yard-dog taking advantage of this would snatch the dainty morsel and by its loud munching rouse her from her reverie, for which it was always beaten with the oven fork. She even abandoned her favourite pursuits and did not go out shoot-

ing, especially after she shot a crow by mistake for a partridge, a thing which had never happened to her before.

At last, four days later, every one saw the chaise brought out of the carriage house into the yard. The coachman Omelko (he was also the gardener and the watchman) had been hammering from early morning, nailing on the leather and continually chasing away the dogs who licked the wheels. I think it my duty to inform my readers that this was the very chaise in which Adam used to drive; and therefore, if any one gives out that some other chaise was Adam's, it is an absolute lie, and his chaise is certainly not the genuine article. It is impossible to say how it survived the Deluge. It must be supposed that there was a special coach-house for it in Noah's Ark. I am very sorry that I cannot give a living picture of it for my readers. It is enough to say that Vassilissa Kashparovna was very well satisfied with its structure and always expressed regret that the old style of carriages had gone out of fashion. The chaise had been constructed a little on one side, so that the right half stood much higher than the left, and this pleased her particularly, because, as she said, a stout person could sit on one side and a tall person on the other. Inside the chaise, however, there was room for five small persons or three such as Auntie herself.

About midday Omelko, having finished with the chaise, brought out of the stable three horses which were a little younger than the chaise, and began harnessing them with cord to the magnificent equipage. Ivan Fyodorovitch and his aunt, one on the left side and the other on the right, stepped in and the chaise drove off.

The peasants they met on the road seeing this sumptuous turn-out (Vassilissa Kashparovna rarely drove out in it) stopped respectfully, taking off their caps and bowing low.

Two hours later the chaise stopped at the front door—I think I need not say—of Stortchenko's house. Grigory Grigoryevitch was not at home. His old mother and the two young ladies came into the dining-room to receive the guests. Auntie walked in with a majestic step, with a great air stopped short with one foot in front, and said in a loud voice:

"I am delighted, dear madam, to have the honour to offer you my respects in person; and at the same time to thank you for your hospitality to my nephew, who has been warm in his praises of it. Your buckwheat is very good, madam—I saw it as we drove into the village. May I ask how many sheaves you get to the acre?"

After that followed kisses all round. As soon as they were seated in the drawing-room, the old lady began:

"About the buckwheat I cannot tell you: that's Grigory Grigoryevitch's department: it's long since I have had anything to do with the farming; indeed, I am not equal to it, I am old now! In old days I remember the buckwheat stood up to my waist; now goodness knows what it is like, though they do say everything is better now." At that point the old lady heaved a sigh, and some observers would have heard in that sigh the sigh of a past age, of the eighteenth century.

"I have heard, madam, that your own maids can make excellent carpets," said Vassilissa Kashparovna, and with that touched on the old lady's most sensitive chord: at those words she seemed to brighten up, and

she talked readily of the way to dye the yarn and prepare the thread.

From carpets the conversation passed easily to the salting of cucumbers and drying of pears. In short, before the end of an hour the two ladies were talking together as though they had been friends all their lives. Vassilissa Kashparovna had already said a great deal to her in such a low voice that Ivan Fyodorovitch could not hear what she was saying.

"Yes, would not you like to have a look at them?" said the old lady, getting up.

The young ladies and Vassilissa Kashparovna also got up and all moved towards the maids' room. Auntie made a sign, however, to Ivan Fyodorovitch to remain and said something in an undertone to the old lady.

"Mashenka," said the latter, addressing the fair-haired young lady, "stay with our visitor and talk with him, that he may not be dull!"

The fair-haired young lady remained and sat down on the sofa. Ivan Fyodorovitch sat on his chair as though on thorns, blushed and cast down his eyes; but the young lady appeared not to notice this and sat unconcernedly on the sofa, carefully scrutinising the windows and the walls, or watching the cat timorously running round under the chairs.

Ivan Fyodorovitch grew a little bolder and would have begun a conversation; but it seemed as though he had lost all his words on the way. Not a single idea came into his mind.

The silence lasted for nearly a quarter of an hour. The young lady went on sitting as before.

At last Ivan Fyodorovitch plucked up his courage.

"There are a great many flies in summer, madam!" he brought out in a half-trembling voice.

"A very great many!" answered the young lady. "My brother has made a flapper out of an old slipper of mamma's on purpose to kill them, but there are lots of them still."

Here the conversation dropped again, and Ivan Fyodorovitch was utterly unable to find anything to say.

At last the old lady together with his aunt and the dark-haired young lady came back again. After a little more conversation, Vassilissa Kashparovna took leave of the old lady and her daughters in spite of their entreaties that they would stay the night. The three ladies came out on the steps to see their visitors off, and continued for some time nodding to the aunt and nephew, as they looked out of the chaise.

"Well, Ivan Fyodorovitch, what did you talk about when you were alone with the young lady?" Auntie asked him on the way home.

"A very discreet and well-behaved young lady, Marya Grigoryevna!" said Ivan Fyodorovitch.

"Listen, Ivan Fyodorovitch, I want to talk seriously to you. Here you are thirty-eight, thank God; you have obtained a good rank in the service—it's time to think about children! You must have a wife. . . ."

"What, Auntie!" cried Ivan Fyodorovitch panic-stricken, "a wife! No, Auntie, for goodness' sake . . . You make me quite ashamed. . . . I've never had a wife. . . . I shouldn't know what to do with her!"

"You'll find out, Ivan Fyodorovitch, you'll find out," said his aunt, smiling, and she thought to herself:

"what next, he is a perfect baby, he knows nothing!" "Yes, Ivan Fyodorovitch!" she went on aloud, "we could not find a better wife for you than Marya Grigoryevna. Besides, you are very much attracted by her. I have had a good talk with the old lady about it: she'll be delighted to see you her son-in-law. It's true that we don't know what that reprobate Grigoryevitch will say to it; but we won't consider him, and if he takes it into his head not to give her a dowry, we'll have the law of him. . . ."

At that moment the chaise drove into the yard and the ancient nags grew more lively, feeling that their stable was not far off.

"Mind, Omelko! Let the horses have a good rest first, and don't take them down to drink the minute they are unharnessed; they are overheated."

"Well, Ivan Fyodorovitch," his aunt went on as she got out of the chaise, "I advise you to think it over well. I must run to the kitchen: I forgot to tell Soloha what to get for supper, and I expect the wretched girl won't have thought of it herself."

But Ivan Fyodorovitch stood as though thunder-struck. It was true that Marya Grigoryevna was a very nice-looking young lady; but to get married . . . ! It seemed to him so strange, so peculiar, he couldn't think of it without horror. Living with a wife . . . ! Unthinkable! He would not be alone in his own room, but they would always have to be two together . . . ! Perspiration came out on his face as he sank more deeply into meditation.

He went to bed earlier than usual but in spite of all his efforts he could not go to sleep. But at last sleep, that universal comforter, came to him; but such sleep!

He had never had such incoherent dreams. First, he dreamed that everything was whirling with a noise around him, and he was running and running, as fast as his legs could carry him. . . . Now he was at his last gasp. . . . All at once some one caught him by the ear. "Aïe! who is it?" "It is I, your wife!" a voice resounded loudly in his ear—and he woke up. Then he imagined that he was married, that everything in their little house was so peculiar, so strange: a double-bed stood in his room instead of a single one; his wife was sitting on a chair. He felt queer: he did not know how to approach her, what to say to her, and then he noticed that she had the face of a goose. He happened to turn aside and saw another wife, also with the face of a goose. Turning in another direction, he saw yet a third wife; and behind him was still another. Then he was seized by panic: he dashed away into the garden: but there it was hot, he took off his hat, and—saw a wife sitting in his hat. Drops of sweat came out on his face. He put his hand in his pocket for his handkerchief and in his pocket too there was a wife; he took some cotton-wool out of his ear—and there too sat a wife. . . . Then he suddenly began hopping on one leg, and Auntie, looking at him, said with a dignified air: "Yes, you must hop on one leg now, for you are a married man." He went towards her, but his aunt was no longer an aunt but a belfry, and he felt that some one was dragging him by a rope on the belfry. "Who is it pulling me?" Ivan Fyodorovitch asked plaintively. "It is I, your wife. I am pulling you because you are a bell." "No, I am not a bell, I am Ivan Fyodorovitch," he cried. "Yes, you are a bell," said the colonel of the P—— infantry regiment, who

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happened to be passing. Then he suddenly dreamed that his wife was not a human being at all but a sort of woollen material; that he went into a shop in Mogilyev. "What sort of stuff would you like?" asked the shopkeeper. "You had better take a wife, that is the most fashionable material! It wears well! Every one is having coats made of it now." The shopkeeper measured and cut off his wife. Ivan Fyodorovitch put her under his arm and went off to a Jewish tailor. "No," said the Jew, "that is poor material! No one has coats made of that now. . . ."

Ivan Fyodorovitch woke up in terror, not knowing where he was; he was dripping with cold perspiration.

As soon as he got up in the morning, he went at once to his fortune-teller's book, at the end of which a virtuous bookseller had in the goodness of his heart and disinterestedness inserted an abridged dream-book. But there was absolutely nothing in it that remotely resembled this incoherent dream.

Meanwhile a quite new design, of which you shall hear more in the following chapter, was being matured in Auntie's brain.

A PLACE BEWITCHED

(A True Story told by the Sacristan.)

UPON my word, I am sick of telling stories! Why, what would you expect? It really is tiresome; one goes on telling stories and there is no getting out of it! Oh, very well, I will tell you a story then; only, mind, it is for the last time. Well, we were talking about a man's being able to get the better, as the saying is, of the Unclean Spirit. To be sure, if you come to that, all sorts of things do happen in this world. . . . Better not say so, though: if the devil wants to bamboozle you he will, upon my soul he will. . . . Here you see my father had the four of us; I was only a silly child then, I wasn't more than eleven, no, not eleven. I remember as though it were to-day when I was running on all fours and set to barking like a dog, my Dad shouted at me, shaking his head: "Ay, Foma, Foma, you are almost old enough to be married and you are as foolish as a young mule."

My Grandfather was still living then and fairly—may his hiccough be easier in the other world—strong on his legs. At times he would take a fancy. . . . But how am I to tell a story like this? Here one of you has been for the last hour raking an ember for his pipe out of the stove and the other has run behind the cupboard for something. It's too much. . . . ! It would be all very well if you didn't want to hear me, but you

kept worrying me for a story. . . . If you want to listen, then listen!

Just at the beginning of spring Dad went with the waggons to the Crimea to sell tobacco; but I don't remember whether he loaded two or three waggons; tobacco fetched a good price in those days. He took my three-year-old brother with him to train him sometimes as a dealer. Grandfather, Mother and I and a brother and another brother were left at home. Grandfather had sown melons on a bit of ground by the roadway and went to stay at the shanty there; he took us with him, too, to scare the sparrows and the magpies off the garden. I can't say it came amiss to us: sometimes we'd eat so many cucumbers, melons, turnips, onions and peas that upon my word, you would have thought there were cocks crowing in our stomachs. Well, to be sure it was profitable too: travellers jog along the road, every one wants to treat himself to a melon, and, besides that, from the neighbouring farms they would often bring us fowls, turkeys, eggs, to exchange for our vegetables. We did very well.

But what pleased Grandfather more than anything was that some fifty dealers would pass with their waggon-loads every day. They are people, you know, who have seen life: if one of them will tell you anything, you may well prick up your ears, and to Grandfather it was like dumplings to a hungry man. Sometimes there would be a meeting with old acquaintances—every one knew Grandfather—and you know yourself how it is when old folks get together: it is this and that, and so then and so then, and so this happened and that happened. . . . Well, they just run on. They remember things that happened, God knows when.

One evening—why, it seems as though it might have happened to-day—the sun had begun to set. Grandfather was walking about the garden taking off the leaves with which he covered the water-melons in the day to save their being scorched by the sun.

"Look, Ostap," I said to my brother, "yonder come some waggons!"

"Where are the waggons?" said Grandfather, as he put a mark on the big melon that the lads mightn't eat it by accident.

There were, as a fact, six waggons trailing along the road, a waggoner, whose moustache had gone grey, was walking ahead of them. He was still—what shall I say? ten paces off, when he stopped.

"Good day, Maxim, so it has pleased God we should meet here."

Grandfather screwed up his eyes. "Ah, good day, good day! Where do you come from? And Bolyatchka here, too! Good day, good day, brother! What the devil! why, they are all here: Krutotryshchenko too! and Petcherytsya! and Kovelyok and Stetsko! Good day! Ha, ha, ho, ho . . . !" And they fell to kissing each other.

They took the oxen out of the shafts and let them graze on the grass; they left the waggons on the road and all sat down in a circle in front of the shanty and lighted their pipes. Though they had no thoughts for their pipes; what with telling stories and chattering, I don't believe they smoked a pipe apiece.

After supper Grandfather began regaling his visitors with melons. So, taking a melon each, they trimmed it neatly with a knife (they were all old hands, had been about a good bit and knew how to eat in company—I

daresay they would have been ready to sit down even at a gentleman's table); after cleaning the melon well, every one made a hole with his finger in it, drank the juice, began cutting it up into pieces and putting them into his mouth.

"Why are you standing there gaping, lads?" said my grandfather. "Dance, you puppies! where's your pipe, Ostap? Now then, the Cossack dance! Foma, arms akimbo! Come, that's it, hey, hop!"

I was a brisk lad in those days. Cursed old age! Now I can't step out like that; instead of cutting capers, my legs can only trip and stumble. For a long time Grandad watched us as he sat with the dealers. I noticed that his legs wouldn't keep still, it was as though something was tugging at them.

"Look, Foma," said Ostap, "if the old chap isn't going to dance."

What do you think, he had hardly uttered the words when the old man could resist it no longer! He longed, you know, to show off before the dealers.

"I say, you little devils, is that the way to dance! This is the way to dance!" he said, getting up on to his feet, stretching out his arms and tapping with his heels.

Well, there is no denying he did dance, he couldn't have danced better if it had been with the Hetman's wife. We stood aside and the old man went twirling his legs all over the flat place beside the cucumber beds. But as soon as he had got half-way through the dance and wanted to do his best and cut some capers with his legs in a whirl—his feet wouldn't rise from the ground, whatever he did! "What a plague!" He moved backwards and forwards again, got to the middle

of the dance—it wouldn't go! Whatever he did—he couldn't do it and he didn't do it! His legs stood still as though made of wood. "Look you, the place is bewitched, look you, it is a visitation of Satan! The Herod, the enemy of mankind has a hand in it!" Well, he couldn't disgrace himself before the dealers like that, could he? He made a fresh start and began cutting tiny trifling capers, a joy to see; up to the middle—then no! it wouldn't be danced, and that is all about it!

"Ah, you rascally Satan! I hope you may choke with a rotten melon, that you may perish when you are little, son of a bitch. See what shame he has brought me to in my old age . . . !" And indeed some one did laugh behind his back.

He looked round; no melon garden, no dealers, nothing; behind, in front, on both sides was a flat field. "Ay! Sss! . . . Well, I never!" he began screwing up his eyes—the place doesn't seem quite unfamiliar: on one side a copse, behind the copse some sort of post sticking up which can be seen far away against the sky. Dash it all! but that's the dovecote in the priest's garden! On the other side, too, there is something greyish; he looked closer: it was the district clerk's threshing barn. So this was where the unclean power had dragged him! Going round in a ring, he hit upon a little path. There was no moon: instead of it a white blur glimmered through a dark cloud.

"There will be a high wind to-morrow," thought Grandad. All at once there was the gleam of a light on a little grave to one side of the path. "Well, I never!" Grandad stood still, put his arms akimbo and stared at it. The light went out; far away and a little further yet, another twinkled. "A treasure!"

cried Grandad. "I'll bet anything if it's not a treasure!" And he was just about spitting on his hands to begin digging when he remembered that he had no spade nor shovel with him. "Oh what a pity! Well—who knows?—maybe I've only to lift the turf and there it lies, the precious dear! Well, there's nothing for it, I'll mark the place anyway so as not to forget it afterwards."

So pulling along a good-sized branch that must have been broken off by a high wind, he laid it on the little grave where the light gleamed and went along the path. The young oak copse grew thinner; he caught a glimpse of a fence. "There, didn't I say that it was the priest's garden?" thought Grandad. "Here's his fence; now it is not three-quarters of a mile to the melon patch."

It was pretty late, though, when he came home, and he wouldn't have any dumplings. Waking my brother Ostap, he only asked him whether it was long since the dealers had gone, and then rolled himself up in his sheepskin. And when Ostap was beginning to ask him: "And what did the devils do with you to-day, Grandad?" "Don't ask," he said, wrapping himself up tighter than ever, "don't ask, Ostap, or your hair will turn grey!"

And he began snoring so that the sparrows who had been flocking together to the melon patch rose up into the air in a fright. But how was it he could sleep? There's no denying, he was a sly beast. God give him the kingdom of Heaven, he could always get out of any scrape; sometimes he would pitch such a yarn that you would have to bite your lips.

Next day as soon as ever it began to get light Grandad put on his smock, fastened his belt, took a spade

and shovel under his arm, put on his cap, drank a mug of kvass, wiped his lips with his skirt and went straight to the priest's kitchen garden. He passed both the hedges and the low oak copse and there was a path winding out between the trees and coming out into the open country; it seemed like the same. He came out of the copse and the place seemed exactly the same as yesterday: yonder he saw the dovecote sticking out, but he could not see the threshing barn. "No, this isn't the place, it must be a little further; it seems I must turn a little towards the threshing barn!" He turned back a little and began going along another path—then he could see the barn but not the dovecote. Again he turned, and a little nearer to the dovecote the barn was hidden. As though to spite him it began drizzling with rain. He ran again towards the barn—the dovecote vanished; towards the dovecote—the barn vanished.

"You damned Satan, may you never live to see your children!" he cried. And the rain came down in bucketfuls.

So taking off his new boots and wrapping them in a handkerchief, that they might not be warped by the rain, he ran off at a trot like some gentleman's saddle-horse. He crept into the shanty, drenched through, covered himself with his sheep-skin and set to grumbling between his teeth, and reviling the devil with words such as I had never heard in my life. I must own I should really have blushed if it had happened in broad daylight.

Next day I woke up and looked; Grandad was walking about the melon patch as though nothing had happened, covering the melons with burdock leaves. At

dinner the old chap got talking again and began scaring my young brother, saying he would swop him for a fowl instead of a melon; and after dinner he made a pipe out of a bit of wood and began playing on it; and to amuse us gave us a melon which was twisted in three coils like a snake; he called it a Turkish one. I don't see such melons anywhere nowadays; it is true he got the seed from somewhere far away. In the evening, after supper, Grandad went with the spade to dig a new bed for late pumpkins. He began passing that bewitched place and he couldn't resist saying, "Cursed place!" He went into the middle of it, to the spot where he could not finish the dance the day before, and in his anger struck it a blow with his spade. In a flash—that same field was all around him again: on one side he saw the dovecote standing up, and on the other—the threshing barn. "Well, it's a good thing I be-thought me to bring my spade. And yonder's the path, and there stands the little grave! And there's the branch lying on it, and yonder, see yonder, is the light! If only I have made no mistake!"

He ran up stealthily, holding the spade in the air as though he were going to hit a hog that had poked its nose into a melon patch, and stopped before the grave. The light went out. On the grave lay a stone overgrown with weeds. "I must lift up that stone," thought Grandad, and tried to dig round it on all sides. The damned stone was huge! But planting his feet on the ground he shoved it off the grave. "Goo!" it rolled down the slope. "That's the right road for you to take! Now things will go more briskly!"

At this point Grandad stopped, took out his horn, sprinkled a little snuff in his hand, and was about to

raise it to his nose when all at once, "Tchee-hee," something sneezed above his head so that the trees shook and all Grandad's face was spattered. "You might at least turn aside when you want to sneeze," said Grandad, wiping his eyes. He looked round—there was no one there. "No, it seems the devil doesn't like the snuff," he went on, putting back the horn in his bosom and picking up his spade. "He's a fool! Neither his grandfather nor his father ever had a pinch of snuff like that!" He began digging, the ground was soft, the spade simply went down into it. Then something clanked. Putting aside the earth he saw a cauldron.

"Ah, you precious dear, here you are!" cried Grandad, thrusting the spade under it.

"Ah, you precious dear, here you are!" piped a bird's beak, pecking the cauldron.

Grandad looked round and dropped the spade.

"Ah, you precious dear, here you are!" bleated a sheep's head from the top of the trees.

"Ah, you precious dear, here you are!" roared a bear, poking its snout out from behind a tree. A shudder ran down Grandad's back.

"Why, one is afraid to say a word here!" he muttered to himself.

"One is afraid to say a word here!" piped the bird's beak.

"Afraid to say a word here!" bleated the sheep's head.

"To say a word here!" roared the bear.

"Hm!" said Grandad, and he felt terrified.

"Hm!" piped the beak.

"Hm!" bleated the sheep.

"Hm!" roared the bear.

Grandad turned round in a fright. Mercy on us,

what a night! No stars nor moon; pits all round him, a bottomless precipice at his feet and a crag hanging over his head and looking every minute as though it would break off and come down on him. And Granddad fancied that a horrible face peeped out from behind it. "Oo! Oo!" a nose like a blacksmith's bellows. You could pour a bucket of water into each nostril! Lips like two hogs! Red eyes seemed starting out above and a tongue was thrust out too, and jeering. "The devil take you!" said Granddad, flinging down the cauldron. "Damn you and your treasure! What a loathsome snout!" And he was just going to cut and run, but he looked round and stopped, seeing that everything was as before. "It's only the unclean powers trying to frighten me!"

He set to work at the cauldron again. No, it was too heavy! What was he to do? He couldn't leave it now! So exerting himself to his utmost he clutched at it. "Come, heave ho! again, again!" and he dragged it out. "Ough, now for a pinch of snuff!"

He took out his horn. Before shaking any out though, he took a good look round to be sure there was no one there. He fancied there was no one; but then it seemed to him that the trunk of the tree was gasping and blowing, ears made their appearance, there were red eyes, puffing nostrils, a wrinkled nose and it seemed on the point of sneezing. "No, I won't have a pinch of snuff!" thought Granddad, putting away the horn. "Satan will be spitting in my eyes again!" He made haste to snatch up the cauldron and set off running as fast as his legs could carry him; only he felt something behind him scratching on his legs with twigs. . . . "Aïe, aïe, aïe!" was all that Granddad could cry as

he ran his utmost; and it was not till he reached the priest's kitchen garden that he took breath a little.

"Where can Granddad be gone?" we wondered, waiting three hours for him. Mother had come from the farm long ago and brought a pot of hot dumplings. Still no sign of Granddad! Again we had supper without him. After supper mother washed the pot and was looking where to throw the dishwater because there were melon beds all round, when she sees coming straight towards her a barrel! It was rather dark. She felt sure one of the lads was hiding behind it in mischief and shoving it towards her. "That's just right, I'll throw the water at him," she said, and flung the hot dishwater out.

"Aïe!" shouted a bass voice. Only fancy, Granddad! Well, who would have known him! Upon my word we thought it was a barrel coming up! I must own, though it was rather a sin, we really thought it funny when Granddad's grey head was all drenched in the dishwater and decked with melon peelings.

"I say, you devil of a woman!" said Granddad, wiping his head with the skirt of his smock. "What a hot bath she has given me, as though I were a pig before Christmas! Well, lads, now you will have something for breadrings! You'll go about dressed in gold tunics, you puppies! Look what I have brought you!" said Granddad, and opened the cauldron.

What do you suppose there was in it? Come, think well, and make a guess? Eh? Gold? Well now, it wasn't gold—it was dirt, filth, I am ashamed to say what it was. Granddad spat, dropped the cauldron and washed his hands after it.

And from that time forward Granddad made us two

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swear never to trust the devil. "Don't you believe it!" he would often say to us. "Whatever the foe of our Lord Christ says, he is always lying, the son of a bitch! There isn't a ha'p'orth of truth in him!" And if ever the old man heard that things were not right in some place: "Come, lads, let's cross ourselves! That's it! That's it! Properly!" and he would begin making the sign of the cross. And that accursed place where he couldn't finish the dance he fenced in and bade us fling there all the rubbish, all the weeds and litter which he raked off the melon patch.

So you see how the unclean powers take a man in. I know that bit of ground well; later on some neighbouring Cossacks hired it from Dad for a melon patch. It's capital ground and there is always a wonderful crop on it; but there has never been anything good grown on that bewitched place. They may sow it properly, but there's no saying what it is that comes up: not a melon—not a pumpkin—not a cucumber, the devil only knows what to make of it.